



The rise of the toilet

The toilet of Chrispass Kalenga Wanje in Jibana

A small revolution is underway on the coast of Kenya: a new type of brick appears to be the key to safe toilets for both the rich and the poor. A public-private partnership is creating a genuine market of supply and demand. But how is the toilet integrated in society? On a tour in Kilifi.

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The remainder of the mixed cement is used to produce the final bricks that are squeezed out of the red iron machine. Roger Kalama Nguwa and his colleagues shovel away the debris and add the bricks to the day's 'yield'. Two hundred and ten perfectly formed rectangles are bathing in the sun - that'll do for today.

Kalama wipes the sweat from his forehead, which glows under a knitted striped hat, and puts his T-shirt back on. It is not one o'clock yet, but the rest of the day he can produce bricks in his own workplace a little further away, after which there is even time to arrange to meet some friends.

He started work early for the entrepreneur that hired him this week; the first bricks already rolled out of the press at seven o'clock. Twenty-eight-year-old Kalama enjoys producing bricks since he was trained by AMREF three years ago. He has become very skilled at it; progressing from making fifty bricks in half a day when he started, to over two hundred nowadays. He sells a brick for twenty Kenyan shilling (seventeen euro cents), and makes a healthy profit. In any case, he currently earns considerably more than he did at his former workplace, where he produced wooden furniture.

The bricks are used for the toilets promoted by the Financial Inclusion Improves Sanitation and Health in Kenya (Finish Ink) programme; they are called 'interlocking bricks' because of their notches, which means they can be easily stacked: in this way less cement is required. What's more, they are cheaper than bricks made from dead coral which are carved out of stone quarries on the coast to serve as building materials.

The bricks have also surpassed their original purpose; they are no longer exclusively used for toilets, but also for houses. Demand is growing now that the residents of Kilifi town and its vicinity are

starting to discover the bricks. Roger Kalama Nguwa explains that he would like to start his own small business soon.

David Makau, manager of the Finish Ink-programme in the Kilifi district, smiles. This is the role of a development worker in 2018: if you want to provide access to safe sanitation, you seek business opportunities. The market mechanism behind sanitation is an important component of the Finish Ink-programme. Besides its goal of clean sanitation for individual households, the programme also hopes to create a self-funding market in which employment is created through building toilets and houses (also with a toilet of course).

In order to examine the origin of this market we return to earlier this morning: we visited the loan cooperative Imarika Sacco (Kiswahili for 'become stable') in Kilifi, a small, friendly town on the Kenyan coast, divided by a stream where white sailing boats are anchored and along which tourists kayak. The cooperative, founded in 1972, currently has over eighty thousand members. This means the counter is busy to say the least.

Manager Edward Charo's office is on the first floor. Through the cooperative people can save and borrow money via the M-Pesa system, which has conquered East Africa with its mobile payment traffic. Most Imarika Sacco members are people active in the informal sector that would not normally have access to financial services, such as small-scale farmers and shopkeepers that have shops along the road selling all kinds of wares: clothing, mobile phone credit, sunglasses, toilet seats, gravestones, samosas or goat's meat baked and roasted in old oil. Or, in Charo's words: "Not the people with serious money, but those that keep our economy going."

Imarika encourages savings of two thousand shillings (seventeen euros) a month. This does not sound like much, but it is much for a Kenyan family, who on average earn hundred to three hundred euros a month. The least well-off, who live on between one to four euros a day, cannot participate. Charo: "We serve the working

poor, those who are economically active. The poorest of all have no money; they have to rely on NGOs and the government. After all, we have to ensure that our business remains healthy."

Imarika encourages the construction of toilets.
"Otherwise people come to ask for a loan to buy medicines for diarrhoea and dehydration"

Imarika encourages the construction of toilets. "Otherwise, people continue to ask for loans to pay for medicines for diarrhoea and dehydration as a result of the cholera bacteria", Charo explains. "And if they get sick, people cannot work to repay their loans." Therefore, Imarika began working with AMREF in 2015. "Initially people were sceptical about toilets. Most collapsed as a result of repeated flooding and people had to rebuild them every year."

AMREF takes a more serious approach. It offers a free on-site inspection, trains craftsmen and collects good materials to build a proper toilet. Imarika has now issued 2,440 loans for sanitation and they are almost all paid back within one year. People can choose between various toilet formulas: a simple version costs 130 euros, and one with a septic tank costs about 430 euros. If you want to upgrade

A cheaper toilet in Jibana for the poorer villagers, with a strong pit and thatched housing

A toilet collapsed due to floods



Finish Ink

Finish Ink is a consortium involving Waste (chair), AMREF the Netherlands, SNS Reaal and UNU Merit and is subsidised by the RVO Sustainable Water Fund (FDW) programme. FDW is financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and parties involved in the public-private partnership. The Ministry strives to encourage public-private part-

nerships in the water sector, with the aim of improving water safety and security in developing countries. Through the Finish Ink programme AMREF works together with the local ministries of Health, financial institutions and craftsmen to be trained who can build toilets in the districts of Kilifi and Busia.

himself, but at a public primary school a short distance away. There they still use old-style toilets. Kahindi pulls a face: "It stinks there, it's filthy. That's how people get sick."

We ask why the school does not have a proper toilet built. Kahindi says nothing for a moment, looks at the ground and smiles. "The government issues its own contracts. They have toilets built for two million shillings (17,000 euros)." The smile of pity spreads on his face. "Compare that with these toilets costing just 160,000 shillings (1,380 euros)."

When faced with such an answer, you usually know the underlying reason in Kenya, as it is number 143 on the corruption index of Transparency International, which features in total 160 countries. In any case you can guess that the two million shillings was not spent entirely on toilets. Any attempt by NGOs to improve living conditions is not unrelated to the current policy structures.

This is also apparent from the water supply. Because a major pipeline is being constructed, there are water shortages all along the coast – and Kahindi's refined water system is therefore of little use. As a solution he relies on his own water source, at home, a few metres away. However, this means that he has to walk back and forth to refill the cisterns. "Perhaps I could buy a large tank to store the water in", he says optimistically.

Before we leave, we ask why one toilet does not have a sink and the other toilet does not have a door. "Stolen", Kahindi explains. "We need to fit good locks on the doors. Or arrange armed security, at night." Nothing is too extreme to protect your expensive toilet from the big, bad, outside world.

As we drive into the small village of Jibana via the bumpy, sandy road, the first thing that catches our attention is a collapsed thatched ruin, which was a toilet until just a few days ago. That's not how things should be done. Apparently not all the villagers were convinced of the practical use of a proper toilet, but this could be the final push to persuade those who are still reluctant.

Apart from this, the village looks reasonably clean. However, if you would have come here a couple of years ago, the stench would have been unbearable. People urinated and defecated in the bush-

es or in ramshackle pits that collapsed each time there was heavy rainfall. The village was plagued by cholera and diarrhoea. Over 61 percent of the rural population in Kenya has no access to proper sanitation and seventeen percent urinates and defecates outdoors.

Three years ago AMREF built a 'demo toilet' here, to show the community what a proper toilet looks like. Chrispass Kalenga Wanje, village chief and one of the volunteer health workers with whom AMREF works, was the first to show his enthusiasm. His cheerful toilet, painted yellow, is like a showroom in the middle of the village square.

"I must serve as a good example for the community", Kalenga exclaims. He also drives around a small kiosk. "If I want to sell my items to people, my hands must be clean." So, he has even installed a tap with a bottle full of antibacterial soap in front of the toilet. The toilet cost 857 euros. "It's a lot of money, but it's important."

Although it took a while before everyone in the village was convinced of its practical use. "At first", says David Makau, "it was difficult to get people to invest in a toilet, they thought that we should build the toilets for them. They are used to getting help for free. But just imagine: when you live in a house made of thatch and corrugated sheets, you're not going to build a toilet from bricks, are you?"

The residents of Jibana would therefore not pay for a standard toilet. So the villagers were able to opt for a cheap version; a toilet with a stone structure around the pit which meant that it would not collapse, but the external housing is made of thatch and corrugated sheets. You just need fifty euros and most people can pay this amount back within one year.

According to Kalenga's administration, 106 of the 123 households have a proper toilet now. Makau: "And they paid for it themselves, so there is no question of ownership; they also want to maintain and clean it themselves."

Wasn't the government prepared to provide good sanitation in the village? Makau and Kalenga briefly shake their heads. "The law states that people must have proper sanitation", Makau explains, "so it is the government's duty to do something about it. However, it boils down to laxity and sometimes ignorance. The authorities sometimes come to visit, but don't know which materials are good, so the toilets collapse."

Makau formed a partnership with the local authorities and the chief. "They participated when we rolled out the programme. We stimulate the government by providing a good example, so that they do what they are supposed to do. When we leave here shortly, they will have to continue to monitor the village."

After Jibana, my day excursion along the sanitation mechanisms of Finish Ink comes to an end. A day during which – I only realise later – I have only spoken with men. This does not mean that the programme does not have a clear gender component: simply by building toilets, women do not have to urinate and defecate outdoors, where they run the risk of being raped. Moreover, girls with a toilet at school can also attend lessons when they are menstruating.

Nevertheless, the lack of female involvement in the programme has backfired to a certain extent: it was recently discovered that the toilets designed by Finish Ink are too narrow for the more sturdily built women with broad hips. The toilet designer was a man, and had based his design on a male figure.

The Finish Ink programme in Kilifi and Busia will run until mid-2019, by which time 20,500 new sanitation systems will have to be

your toilet, with tiles, a nice paint and a mirror, you have to invest a maximum of 700 euros.

This year Kenya suffered from its heaviest rainfall in decades. The coastal region suffered from severe flooding. Charo: "However, this time the cholera outbreaks were less serious in this area. We do not have any scientific evidence, but we cautiously believe that this is because of the toilets."

After all this talk about toilets, it is time to see a real toilet. At a small kindergarten fifteen curious children's faces greet us through the open windows of the classroom, their high voices calling out 'mambo', a Swahili greeting. There is a toilet block at the site, with three toilets. Two young boys have a race to see who can get there first, and the winner slams the door behind him; the 'loser' looks at us timidly.

Michael Kahindi is waiting for us. He is responsible for having this private school built, including the toilet block and a large underground septic tank, using an Imarika loan. He does not teach here

Michael Kahindi waiting in front of the school toilets



Roger Kalama Nguwa produces the special interlocking bricks used for the toilets

built, while the ambition for 2025 is even greater: 196,000 systems. It is hoped that the programme can be extended from Kenya and India to many other countries, including Uganda, Tanzania, Bangladesh and Ethiopia.

However, at least as important is the market that is created as a result, in which five million loans have been issued to date. This market, which is slowly leaving its infancy phase, will ultimately have to be self-sufficient. Craftsmen like Roger Kalama should have healthy businesses to satisfy demand from the population.

The toilets proved too narrow for women with broad hips. The toilet designer was a man, and had based his design on a male figure

It is the intention that the government will take over AMREF's role, as a monitor and adviser and to make the necessary initial investments: for example, in hydraulic machines that can be used to make bricks more quickly. The government in Kilifi has already purchased six of these machines.

And manager Makau? During the return journey, in the car on the way to the town of Kilifi, I ask how he sees his future in this scenario. He smiles: "Perhaps I will become a sanitation consultant for the government. So that I do the same work as I do now, but am paid by the market and not from development aid funds." ●