

4

Unlimited Possibilities!
The case of Women Rights centres.

6

Another angle to the impact of staff turnover

8

Community seed banks change women's lives

News

act:onaid



ActionAid Uganda's Monthly Newsletter Issue, July 2012 Edition

IMPACT

Editorial:

What is Impact?

In the development discourse the term impact is used to different ends by various users. At ActionAid, to understand impact requires us to appreciate the change we aspire to see. In ActionAid, we believe that poverty is an injustice that is caused and fueled by unequal power relations that permeate society from the very basic unit of society - the family to international levels.

To overcome poverty therefore requires us to redress power imbalances and inequities. As such our interventions are shaped by a twin logic and desire to transform the *condition* and *position* of poor women, men, boys and girls that we target in our work. In engaging with the condition dimension, we do what is commonly understood as service delivery where we build schools, respond to disasters or supply agricultural inputs to farmer groups we work with, while for the position dimension, our REFLECT circles and other citizen mobilization and conscientization aim to strengthen the decision making power of ordinary citizens to influence decisions that affect their lives.

In this edition of the newsletter we share stories that relate to the impact of our work from both the condition and position dimensions. We believe in impact when we see it in the lives of the people we work hard to reach and in their ability to influence decisions that have a direct bearing on their wellbeing.

You are all welcome to this edition of the newsletter that talks impact!

You may notice that our Newsletter Head looks a bit different in this edition. ActionAid International Uganda is marking its 30 Year Anniversary in November 2012 with the Theme "30 Years of Service for Humanity in Uganda". Read more on page 3

The Paradox of ActionAid's work

By Arthur LAROK, Country Director



ActionAid Country Director Arthur Larok hands over a motorcycle to NSHAWA, a community organisation in Nsinze sub county, Namutumba district..

A couple of months ago, during a field visit to one of our Local Rights Programmes (LRPs) in Busiki, Namutumba District in Eastern Uganda, I and colleagues at ActionAid Uganda encountered an interesting dilemma worthy of reflection. On our way to interact with some of the community based supported groups, we decided to pay a courtesy call at the District Local Government, as is often the practice. Namutumba was carved out of Iganga District in 2005, as part of the fast growing cottage industries of districts in Uganda. It has a total population of 219,000 people, of which 112,600 (51%) are women and runs a budget of a little under 11 Billion Uganda Shillings per annum (about 4.4 million US Dollars), less than 2% generated locally.

After the usual pleasantries that define such visits - signing the Chairperson's Visitor's Book, a brief from the Chairperson and a few peeps into other district officials' offices, we sat at a Town Hall for a meeting with a bigger delegation from the district to share experiences of our work and also 'seek to understand' the goings about in the district. After 2 hours of discussion, one thing that left me with a sour taste was the district

leadership present at the meeting feigning ignorance of what ActionAid does. There were the usual complaints about lack of an MOU between ActionAid and the Local Government leading to lack of transparency and not knowing exactly what we do, there were also contradictory tales from some of the district leaders with calls that ActionAid needs to expand their work to more Sub Counties, suggesting that our work was appreciated by some! There were many other issues we discussed: the state of infrastructure in the district, human development indicators, corruption and the mistake that the abolition of graduated tax was to the domestic revenue generation efforts.

Fast forward, our next stop was at Nsinze Sub County where we work with a community based organisation called NSHAWA (Nsinze Sub County HIV/AIDS Women's Association) to bring hope to women and families ravaged by HIV. We work with them on Income generating activities to enable them feed their families, we have opened

Continued on page 2

...The Paradox of ActionAid's work

Continued from page 1

up acres of land for farming, have provided agricultural inputs including seed and Ox Ploughs all to respond to their immediate needs and condition. We also support a Reflect Circle that enables hitherto excluded women and young people collectively think through means of improving their livelihoods using community resources and how they can aggregate demands to leaders at all levels make district development programming build on and respond to modest efforts ordinary people are making to transform their lives thereby transforming their position in decision making. At the meeting at the sub-county NSHAWA presented a report on the impact of their work. HIV affected women sang songs of appreciation for NSHAWA and told the story of how stronger they feel as a result NSHAWA's intervention and the better life they live.

When the Lower Local Government Officials stood up to make their remarks, they praised NSHAWA, the LC III Chairperson remarked, 'their report is accurate and we are grateful for their intervention'. The Community Development Officer (CDO) at Sub County level added, '...NSHAWA is one of the most relevant NGOs in the district... our families have settled because of their work...' and 'our poor women are able to access HIV/AIDS support services for curative and preventive purposes', another councillor intimated! In here lies a profound lesson that we need to accept as an organisation our impact may not have the tag ActionAid, but rather be seen in the work that our development associates and organisations we work with demonstrate as we heard in the case of NSHAWA.

When I finally got a chance to speak, I started off by repeating what the District Leaders had told us at the Town Hall meeting about not knowing what we do as an organisation! You should have seen how angry the women and community members for whom our work means so much became. I quickly realised that there were other reasons for the district leaders feigning ignorance of our work, but that is for another time. My joy was in seeing ordinary women, men and children speak positively and genuinely about the impact of our work and worried less about the political message that the District Leadership appeared to be giving us for at the end of the day, impact is best felt and seen through the lives of people we work hard for.

And so there may well be no paradox in the first place!

Activista changing the power dynamics in Amuru

By Nicholus Atwine, Finance and Administration Officer



When ActionAid started working in Amuru and Nwoya, the people shared with us that their vision for the revitalisation of livelihood and restoration of peace would be realised when the children, youth, women and men were empowered to actively contribute to decisions that affected them. This is because the armed conflicts over two decades destroyed the livelihood options and cultural leadership and practices that used to groom responsible citizens.

After almost two years of ActionAid work in Amuru and Nwoya, the rise of REFLECT Circles (community groups) have gone further to form lobby groups at sub county levels, CSO platforms and Activista (ActionAid Youth) groups, all in a bid to find solutions to the problems that affect them.

Activista (now 396 members) in particular came up strongly to challenge unequal power relations and demand accountability from duty bearers. They realised that the government had come up with good plans intended to improve their lives such as PRDP (Peace Recovery and Development Plan), NUSAF (Northern Uganda Social Action Fund), NAADS (National Agricultural Advisory Services), etc., but disclosed that civil servants failed to organise the youth, inform the public and supervise the projects, leading to loss of money, substandard deliveries from suppliers, e.g. small and very young goats in relation to the prices quoted.

In pursuit of their rights the Activistas were opposed, intimidated and monitored by state officials and Amuru district top officials as the issues raised were directly linked to their work. Cliques were organized against Activista, and at one talk show on Radio Mega the RDC Amuru baptized the Amuru Activista as a "Rebel group being mobilized by ActionAid", mistaking Activista as politically motivated.

The Activista has nevertheless managed to build and strengthen confidence. They wrote a petition to the RDC (Resident District commissioner), the CAO (Chief Administrative Officer) and the LCV Chairperson requiring them to explain various issues, amongst them why the ghost health centre III in Otwee was deserted; why district officials absented from work; about shoddy road works, criteria for distribution of PRDP iron sheets, and why youth leaders were not sworn into office after 7 months, etc.

After a long and persistent engagement by the Activista, the former RDC had made an informed decision to support Activista work in Amuru as he realised that it was in line with his work, especially with the Barazas. He made this during a meeting organized by ActionAid which brought together CSO's, youth leaders, councillors and 206 Activista members.

The success of Activista in Amuru have attracted attention, and as a result, Nwoya Activista

has already raised health and maternal issues to the attention of Nwoya district.

The youth realised that it is possible as a collective to challenge even the most powerful people and structures in the society. It is fair to say that Activista has gained a strong ground amongst the community members who now see it as their hope to put to an end the misuse of public offices by some government officers in Amuru district.



Photo: Francis Enorut

The Amuru District Commissioner, Richard Odongo supports Activista.

The Power Hungry Leader?

By Eunice Musiime,
Programme Manger – National NGO Forum

The elections are here:
"Can I be your leader?
Can I be your pleader?
Can I be your redeemer?"

Thank you for making me your choice.
Now, we shall rejoice,
Now, your rights are my cause,
Now, I can be your voice."

Yet, decades later,
Mothers are dying,
Teachers are crying,
Youth are wailing,
And farmers are yawning.

And they ask,
"What can I do as a citizen?
What can I do as peasant?
What can we do as elite?"

And they ask,
"Will it take courage?
Will it take homage?
Will it take lineage?"

ActionAid Uganda @ 30 – Let's celebrate. Together

By Communications Advisor Jacob Rosdahl



Photo: Thomas White/ActionAid

Some of the reasons why ActionAid is struggling, our sponsored children

It is one special year, this 2012. For Uganda indeed, and for ActionAid. This year ActionAid Uganda is celebrating our first 30 years of service for some of the most vulnerable and poor people on the planet. We promise to keep up the struggle for the next 30 years, and many more if that's what it takes to fulfil our vision: a world without poverty and injustice in which every person enjoys the right to a life with dignity.

While we know that our dream is yet to come true, even worse, not shared by all, we are proud of our achievements throughout the 30 years. Yet also humbled; by the tasks ahead of us as a truly Ugandan development organisation, and by the struggle that our friends and allies in the communities are facing each and every day.

Maimuna, Nulu, Habibu, Rose, Polly, Doreen, Nighty. These are some of the wonderful people that we have come across in 2012. Each of these names represents a struggle, and a victory. We find the HIV positive woman who is able to cater for her family and demand her right to treatment, there is the program officer who every day struggles for the rights of the most vulnerable women in her village, there is the LRA survivor, there is the woman who was overworked but was able to face her husband and regain a decent family life, there is the

man who despite of culture and tradition had the courage to change from abusive to caring, there is the small holder woman farmer who represents the most significant, though most oppressed, solution to end hunger in the world. There is the disabled girl who every day fights her way through the bush, in her wheel chair, because she wants to go school and eventually become a nurse.

Behind these beautiful names you will find extraordinary efforts but, really, no more extraordinary that you will find in any village in Uganda. As ActionAid we join their struggle, and our modest contribution is to embrace their rights, thus improving their lives. Is it a coincidence that many of these personalities are women? No, as ActionAid we are especially focused on women's rights.

It all started in Mityana 30 years ago. We were a programme of ActionAid Kenya, but a Ugandan wants her independence and soon we became a true affiliate in the ActionAid Federation. Today ActionAid Uganda is a well respected and significant member of ActionAid International and we are working in 49 districts in Uganda. While our focus has changed over the years from service delivery to a Human Rights Based Approach, we still take sides with the poor and vulnerable.

As firm believer in universal and undividable human rights, ActionAid is much more than a charity or a development organisation. We are present in all corners of Uganda's civil society because we are not only fighting for rights under the Mango tree but also in government offices, in courts, in parliament and in public learning spaces where we think and act together as concerned citizens with our partners and in coalitions. In a wider perspective, poor governance, corruption and incompetence are also violations of rights. In that regard there is still work to be done in Uganda!

In November we will take the liberty to celebrate ourselves, leading up to a climax November 27th and 28th. However, we will not let the festivities overshadow our focus and our mission. We will utilize this 30 years anniversary to reflect on our own impact, on the villages and on the Ugandan society, not to stir up a "midlife crisis" for ourselves but to be just and bold about our achievements and failures. Together with good friends, and not-so-good friends, academia, allies and partners we will reflect on our work both retrospectively and prospectively, examining what role we have played in all these years and forecasting how we positively can influence the future of Uganda. Please let us share with you, as you celebrate with us.

Unlimited Possibilities! The case of Women Rights centres

By Harriet Robino Gimbo, Programme Development Manager



Women won't wait!!! What will the men do? Was the welcome note for us in Pallisa where this campaign started in 2007 and eventually led to the opening of the Women Rights Centres. The campaign's focus was on tracking, and a necessary call for changes, in the policies, programming and funding streams of national governments and international agencies to HIV and AIDS/Violence Against Women/Girls. While ActionAid in the past had been working on prevention and response to Gender based violence, a deeper thought and research found out that it is linked to HIV and AIDS. The centres were then started as a strategy to address the twin epidemics but also provide safe spaces for women that have faced violence in both private and public spheres.

Over the years Police and ActionAid had once or more than thrice accommodated a girl or woman who had undergone violence. It all became sad when the girls and women had to share houses with police, or use spaces in the corridors of police till the next day when a safe home is found for them. The undue vulnerability that came with this was a daunting thought for women and other stakeholders who needed to see them live a dignified life after abuse which was blurred by the available options.

Turning the tide into an opportunity

In 2007 the idea developed after a team of AAIU staff visited Johannesburg and saw a similar shelter and its tremendous contribution to girls and women's lives. The learnings and our experience in 2007 under the Access to Justice project in Northern Uganda funded by Canadian Government shaped the idea of having a similar facility in areas where we work. Through a grant given through ActionAid USA a two year pilot was started in Pallisa, Nebbi and Mubende. The start was not easy because of the nature of the African society that had non functional traditional systems to address this, but also highly patriarchal. The centres provided temporary accommodation, legal aid, psychosocial support, information/awareness, personal safety planning and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms for the conflicting parties.

The prouds

- The silence has been broken about gender based violence. Girls and women where we work can speak out without fear of reprisal. The need to uphold the rights of girls and women in Pallisa, Nebbi and Mubende has been embraced by the cultural institutions of Bugwere, Alur and Iteso who are gradually weeding out negative practices that perpetuate abuse. A charter of practices to be denounced and promoted has been developed by the BACU (Bugwere Cultural Union) and Alur kingdom.

- The centres have offered learning for the Ministry of gender, women's organizations, civil society organizations, districts and line departments which resulted into funding support for expansion by DFID to eight locations and one by UNFA in Lira.
- Our work also contributed to the efforts of enactment of the Domestic Violence Act in 2010 that had been shelved for long. It was sparked off by the story of a woman who had been kept at the centre after reporting a rare case of breast feeding puppies because of bride price expectations.
- Support has been given to over 3500 women to date faced with violence either through legal aid, accommodation, information, training in safety planning, self and crisis management and income generating activities.
- The centres have enabled the strengthening of the referral path way and collaborative working between civil society, police, court, probation and the informal courts. These have been formed into a coalition against gender based violence in the districts.

Lessons for the future

- At the initiation of the centres there should be massive awareness for uptake, acceptance and utilization of the facility by the community.
- Cooperation and coordination between stakeholders and institutions at all levels, formal and informal is crucial to secure women's access to justice. In all successfully resolved cases stakeholders have worked together and complemented each other to prevent gaps in the case management cycle.
- Involvement of men in case management and conflict resolution is pivotal in obtaining lasting results but they should not hijack the women's agenda
- Economically empowered and educated women have a higher degree of independence and control compared to women whose livelihood relies on their spouse.
- Timely and sufficient evidence collection is crucial to obtain justice. Cases that lack evidence are likely to fail or get aborted. Communities must be helped to learn to protect and preserve evidence at the scene of crime especially for sexual and physical assault.
- Eventualities to cater for women that flee with their children should be planned for.

My triumph over Property Grabbing

Anyese Wiajik tells her story how she got her land back with the help of ActionAid Women Protection Centre in Nebbi.

"When my husband died, I was left with no one to fend for me and my children. After some time, my health started deteriorating and I was referred to Arua hospital for treatment. I didn't have the money to go to Arua so I rented out one of my three gardens that my husband had left me, to raise the transport.

When I came back from Arua, I found out that my sister in law had grabbed the land and refused the person to whom I had rented the garden to go to that garden. She had also grabbed my other gardens and an orchard full of oranges.

The elders were not able to help me because they were related to my sister in law and the LC I chairperson was also her son. I was left with no option but to report to ActionAid Women Protection Centre upon the advice of the Police at Nebbi Police station.

I was warmly welcomed by the staff of the women centre who listened to my story. I was then counselled. They wrote a letter inviting my sister in law for a mediation meeting but she refused to turn up. The Staff of the centre then came to our village and invited the Local Council, the village elders and the members of the community. They explained to us the law of succession which provides for division of property of a deceased person in the absence of a will and we were all counselled. My sister in law then admitted her mistakes and signed an agreement to give me back my land.

I was able to get back my gardens and orchard. I am now cultivating my land and through it, am now able to support my family."



Anyese and her dependants with a WPC counselor on a follow up visit

Hule hule !! It's our time to meet and agree on what we want to buy!

By Saida Borgere, Sponsorship Coordinator



The Gift Fund is one of the best things that ever happened to children in the communities where we are having sponsorship managed programs. This is the first opportunity children get to have their voices heard beyond their homes. Through group discussions together with their parents, the children decide how they want to spend the gift fund to their hearts desire!

Why the Gift Fund?

ActionAid's Funding Affiliates around the world are often asked by supporters if they can send a gift directly to their sponsored child. There may be a special event in their own lives that they want to celebrate with the child. Perhaps it is Easter or Christmas time, or simply because they want to give a little extra.

There are practical and logistical difficulties around sending gifts directly from our supporters; including causing jealousies amongst the children in the community as not all are sponsored. Our colleagues in the funding countries can also face problems with collecting gifts that are sent, and the costs involved to post and clear customs of these gifts are high. In order to overcome these problems and ensure that all the children benefit equally, a *Gift Fund* was set up at the Funding Affiliate level for each of the Local Rights Programmes (LRP) where we work.

Supporters therefore make cash donation to the Gift Fund which is left to accumulate over the period of a year, after which it is claimed by the respective Local Rights Programme.

How to spend the Gift Fund?

The children and their parents have the right and responsibility to decide on what to spend the Gift Fund money on through meetings, with consultation by the staff members. It is important to note that all children in the community should benefit from the Gift Fund utilisation, not to single out the sponsored children.

Do Sponsors ever get to know how the Gift Fund was spent?

Yes. Although we cannot write individually to each sponsor that makes a donation, they will be able to read short stories like those above in the Progress Report after spending the gift fund.

Because the amounts donated varies, that will always guide the kind of activity the children can have. The principle however, is to spend that money on areas that make children have fun and get together to enjoy themselves.



"We feel like going up the sky, and the feeling is superb. Thank you our sponsors for the gift fund contributions." These are pupils from Nebbi LRP who benefitted from a number of swings placed at schools and at the community centre.



When these children of Kapchorwa were discussing how to spend their gift fund, they opted for a soft drink refreshment and a biscuit. The day was crowned with fun games and also a talk to the children about the children's rights.



The Kumi LRP pupils in their meeting held at one of the schools. In their discussion on how to spend £42 - Ugx 151,200/=, they opted for geometry sets especially those who were about to sit their final primary examinations.

Inside ActionAid

Merger

The Impact Assessment & Shared Learning (IASL) & Communication's Units gets merged to improve our documentation, show case our work and give Communication's a more strategic focus, and a better link of our IASL work to an external audience.

Staff Joiners

Stanley Wobusobozi is recruited as the IASL & Communication's Manager. He brings experience in qualitative and quantitative research, Monitoring & Evaluation, baseline surveys, organizational reviews and evaluations, policy formulation to mention but a few. Ritah Kyategeka Samanya is our new Communications Officer, and brings experience in marketing, advocacy, editorial and corporate relations.

Akorikin Francis is recruited as Project Coordinator (Public Financing for

Agriculture) and brings in wide experience from Vision TERUDO, CARITAS Norway, Mercy Corps and CIPAR Uganda in children's rights, humanitarian response, livelihoods responses, peace and conflict management.

Training

HROD Director attended a course in EASUN, Tanzania on Facilitating Organizational Development. The course is modular for further skills development and the second module will be in November 2012.

HROD Director attended the ActionAid Annual HROD Managers in Johannesburg 27th -31st August. The conference had focus on the requirements for the People in Aid Accreditation, Global on-line induction, HROD Competency, Change Management Processes, HR tools, etc.

Another angle to the impact of staff turnover

By Catherine Tumusiime, Director Human Resource & Organizational Development



ActionAid Uganda has over the years experienced high staff turnover. In 2011 the turnover rate was 18%, 16% in 2009, 7% in 2010 and up to 23% in 2008.

This has sent shocking waves in the nerves of the Central Management Team (CMT) and staff which could have had far reaching visible and invisible effects on both the implementation of the Country Program, Staff Energy and morale.

The analysis of staff exit interviews, and informal discussions with individuals, reveals that the reasons staff leave vary from person to person, and are: career growth, health, redundancy as a result of program scale down, disciplinary factors, and others such as staff movement to join a relocating family, or the need to find more time for academic advancement.

High staff turnover in ActionAid Uganda has had negative impact on the organization that is both financial and non financial, with the financial impact being an increase in the costs of recruitment which includes advertising, actual recruitment and other related costs of induction & settlement of new staff. The organization spent US \$ 29,073 in 2010, US \$ 26,384 in 2011 and up to March 2012 US \$ 8065 on recruitment costs alone.

The non financial costs of staff turnover include increased ad hoc time spent in the recruitment process and therefore no time for strategic thinking, loss of morale and higher job stress as a result of increased workload on staff remaining, leading to generation of negative energies, loss of organizational memory, leading to loss of knowledge and skills and anxiety among staff. Also the organizational reputation is questioned and management is perceived as not car-

ing, the strategic interests of building women leadership and efforts for succession planning are frustrated, together with loss of productivity and reduced speed of implementation of work plans. All these negatively impact on the performance and growth of the organization.

Is staff turnover all bad?

Learning from previous personal and organizational experience, I have come to appreciate that staff turnover is not entirely a subject of frustration to the organization. As highlighted above, not all reasons for staff exit are negative. Our analysis suggests that poor performers who are not best fit for their roles and indiscipline staff are not considered unwanted turnover. Informal interactions with staff indicate that the continued stay of non-performers and indiscipline staff can be a major de-motivating factor to others.

In addition, if the same team of employees is in place for an extremely long time, they tend to become stale. They may still get the job done, but there will be very little innovation.

Therefore staff turnover has had some benefits to ActionAid Uganda that are both internal and external. Internally, new staff has brought new skills, ideas, innovations and contacts with them. They work hard with positive energy and have been drivers of implementation of change initiatives. Staff turnover has allowed management to restructure some functions and move people into new positions, reassign employees based on their strengths & weaknesses and therefore change the entire focus of the team. Lastly, it has provided management an opportunity to review staff employment terms and conditions that had probably been taken for granted.

Exporting ActionAiders

Externally, ActionAid Uganda has been profiled in various fora and organizations where our former staff has been engaged. Some of the ex-staff that have kept ActionAid Uganda flag flying include Mrs. Specioza Kiwanuka, previously Director of Programs and now Country Director for Build Africa; Mrs. Pamela Nyamutooka, previously Coordinator for Human Security in Emergencies, now Country Director with IIRR; Mr. Geoffrey Nuwamanya, previously Audit Manager, now Head of Audit Department at Posta Uganda; Ms. Florence Auma Apuri, previously Director of Partnership Funding & Sponsorship, now Head of Gender Program with UNFPA; Mr. Justus Rugambwa, previously Program Development Manager and now Executive Director of DENIVA; and Mr. James Kintu, previously Policy Manager and now Director with World Vision.

These and others have done ActionAid Uganda proud having provided them opportunities to build their capacity and therefore come out as a breed of capable leaders that is contributing greatly to the development agenda of this country.

All in all while staff turnover may be seen as an inconvenience, it sometimes provides a wide range of opportunities that are beneficial to the organization, the staff who leave and those who remain. However, the loss of desirable and talented staff remains a costly concern, often with a price tag higher than most organizational leaders can perceive, thus the need for management to deeply interrogate the reasons for leaving and develop strategies for staff motivation and retention. Upon advice from the Board, we are developing a threshold on acceptability of staff turnover.

The Impact of ActionAid's Control Environment

By David Tibekinga Mbarekye, Audit Manager

The term "control environment" refers to systems, policies, procedures, standards, guidelines that form the culture and values of ActionAid. An *effective* control environment is where all the people (from the board members down to casual workers) are aware and understand their responsibilities, the limits to their authority, and are knowledgeable, mindful and committed to doing what is right, and doing it the right way.

In ActionAid, each employee is made aware and asked to be committed to the organization's culture and values by following the policies, procedures guideline and standards that are in place.

Within ActionAid, internal audits are done and whoever is found deviating from our policies procedures and standards that are our major components of control environment is disciplined by the decisions taken by the Management Audit Committee that sits quarterly to re-

view audit reports. Great efforts are being made to ensure that we associate or work with partners that can mirror these values and culture of our control environment. First of all, we are including these controls in the Memorandum of Understanding's we sign with the partners, then conducting internal audits to check compliance with the agreed controls. We withhold funds for a partner whose control environment is found wanting until the control environment of such partner is strengthened.

Also ActionAid is at the moment putting up transparency boards in all the areas of our operations that display our budgets and activities beginning with the year 2013 to inform those we work for what is due for, and then hold us accountable. This will also be encouraged for our partners to do the same.

This success of our the control environment has relied on the board and management who have

created a positive "tone at the top" (leading by example) first by creating good policies and guidelines that are aligned to the our organizational strategic objectives, and then demonstrating their commitment to adhere to such policies and procedures and guidelines

It is fair to say that our good control environment has played its part in increasing our income of the organization from £3,898,000 in 2009 to £5,672, 000 in 2011 due to trust from our donors. However, this has come at a price because partners complain that our controls are many and hard to comply with, and their disbursements are delayed because the compliance and integrity of the partner has to first be evaluated before funds are released to them. We shall continue to improve our internal systems to deal with the negative impacts that may be caused by our control activities, as we are learning from the challenges caused by each control activity.

The signs are that it's working

By Nicholas Young, Managing Editor, Oil in Uganda



More than 2,500 people visited www.oilinuganda.org in September, according to web traffic reports, making it the best month since the project started in March.

Well over a third of our visitors returned to the site at least once during the month. More than 500 came back at least once a week. Several dozen avid readers - including, we have heard, government staff in the Petroleum Exploration and Production Department - visited every day.

September's spike in traffic was probably due in part to our second print newsletter, which focused on land rights and oil, and went out to 33,000 readers, as a paid insert in *The Daily Monitor* - thanks to a small grant from the Democratic Governance Facility.

It needs stressing, however, that we are not aiming at a mass readership. Rather, the website and newsletter target decision takers and opinion makers in government, the private sector, civil society, religious communities and mass media.

Yes, you will correctly point out, the wider public also needs to understand the complexities, opportunities and threats of oil.

But you *can't* write for *all* audiences in a single publication. So *Oil in Uganda* aims at 'thought leaders.' The hope is that if they are informed by accurate reporting - from writers who know and understand their beat - policy debate and public discussion around oil will improve overall.

Wide distribution of our second newsletter was meant to make us visible, to put us 'on the map' of thought leaders. The signs are that it's working.



Allan Ssempebwa (L) and Chris Musiime (R) flank Chantal Sirisena at a farewell supper in the Nanjing Restaurant, Kololo. Chantal didn't manage to eat all the cake.

The intern factor

Our web traffic was likely also boosted by the efforts of two interns: Chantal Sirisena, who is studying Economics at University College, London, and Allan Ssempebwa, who graduates this year from Makerere, where he studied Mass Communications.

They spent a full month visiting and interviewing businesses in Kampala, both international and local, that make a living by providing services to oil companies. The point was to show that Uganda's oil industry is much bigger than just Tullow, Total and CNOOC.

Chantal and Allan did a great job. The 23 company profiles they wrote are now on the OIL PLAYERS | OIL INDUSTRY section of our website. This valuable addition helps to position us as an innovative and authoritative information source that cuts across government-industry-civil society divides.

Allan is staying on for another month to help market the site through facebook and twitter and to develop a contacts database and distribution list.

The duty to learn

Meanwhile, staff writer Chris Musiime travelled to Ghana to learn about and report on that country's experiences with oil. Chris came away with full notebooks and went on to produce a series of informative and insightful articles. This was not only a great contribution to our growing archive. It was also an important learning opportunity for Chris. He has since attended a short ACME (African Centre for Media Excellence) training course on oil reporting, and has now signed up for an oil and gas distance learning programme run by the American Association of Petroleum Geologists.

All of which underlines the point that *if we set out to inform others we have a duty to be well-informed ourselves.*

It's all about money

We are now turning our attention to the bottom line of oil exploration and production: money. It's for money that the companies are here; and it's for money that government opened the doors to them.

Yet, surprisingly, the Public Finance Bill that is currently before parliament (and Chapter VII of which deals with how Uganda's oil revenues will be managed) has received relatively little attention from civil society activists.

This may be because some of the issues are so technical. But we're going to take on those issues in our next print newsletter, due in November, and do our best to make them crystal clear.

ActionAid passes the QuAM test

By Rose Ejang, Programme Secretary



In 2011 ActionAid Uganda carried out self assessment for certification. The aim of the exercise was to show evidence that ActionAid adhered to the ethical standards and norms. The documentation was about identifying and understanding which documents were required for each standard. The exercise was a learning experience for me because I had to read so many documents that I had not had the opportunity to read before.

However, the exercise did not go without challenges. We needed certain documents to support our report that were available in the different units and departments. Although a committee was set up with representation from each unit to expedite the process of self assessment, along the way it became ineffective thus making it difficult to move forward. The major challenge was lack of understanding by staff about QuAM, and we had to explain what QuAM is before requesting for any document. Providing such explana-

tion was not a guarantee that the request would be attended to, and needed several reminders. We faced some difficulty at the beginning but along the way staff understood the requirements for QuAM and would respond immediately to our requests. Towards the end, it was very hectic because we had to complete before the last AGM.

A staff commented "*I think you are even dreaming of QuAM*". Completion was dependent on the pace at which we were able to access the documents. Despite the challenges, we were able to submit our application for certification process. We were successful and have been awarded an Advanced QuAM Certificate, the highest in the QuAM process.

I thank management for giving me the opportunity to be part of the QuAM process which has enhanced my understanding. I urge my colleagues to always pick interest in any learning opportunity that may emerge.

What is QuAM?

NGOs in Uganda launched a self regulating instrument, the NGO Quality Assurance Certification Mechanism [QuAM], a "Code of Honour" in September 2006. It sets principles and standards of behaviour for responsible practice to protect the credibility and integrity of certified NGOs. The QuAM secretariat is currently hosted at Development Network of Indigenous Voluntary Associations [DENIVA].

The QuAM is based on clearly defined Quality Standards and sets out implementation modalities including sanctions in the case of any breach. Quality standards stand at the heart of the certification mechanism and there are altogether 59 standards. A quality standard is a defined benchmark that an organization promises to adhere to. Once issued, the provisions of a Certificate will be binding on the certified NGO.

Community seed banks change women's lives

By Fredrick Kawooya, ActionAid National Programmes Coordinator - Livelihoods

Seed is the most important determinant of agricultural production potential, on which the efficacy of all other agricultural inputs is dependent.

However, the story has been a miserable one for most of the smallholder farmers in Uganda. Following the privatisation of seed production and distribution services in the 1980s as part of the structural adjustment programmes, the government took a backside seat in ensuring farmers access to seed.

The private sector has not performed its functions as expected because of many teething problems. Chief amongst these being that, the private sector, which is unregulated and working with in a flawed system of governance has turned to exploiting farmers through selling low quality seed at sky rocket prices to unsuspecting farmers.

Yet the government remains adamant at investing in the informal seed systems that have supported the communities to meet their food security needs. Indeed, the Seed Statute of 1994 and the draft national seed policy (2009) give exclusive focus on the formal seed systems and private sector lead seed system yet this contributes less than 10% of the farmers' seed requirements.

15,000 women reached

Cognizant of this gap, ActionAid Uganda piloted the concept of community seed banks. The initiative has reached and changed lives of over 15,000 women. Under the initiatives, farmer groups under REFLECT circles identify crops and varieties of their choice and are supported

to access initial seed from reputable seed sources like National Agricultural Research Organisation.

Having gone under training in various aspects of seed production and handling, the individual members are given seed on a loan basis which they pay back in-kind as seed with agreeable interest rates. The farmers are given opportunity to sell surplus seed to their fellow enhancing seed availability in the community at a low cost. This on the other hand provides the members with alternative and additional source of income.

G-nut paid the school fees

Asanansi Kitalimwawe of Buseta Sub-county, Pallisa district is aged 37 and married in a family of 12 people. With her 60 year old husband, Asanansi is the major provider for the family and she relies on farming for both income and food.

"This seed bank has helped us to reach where we are. I was always interested in growing groundnuts as a source of income but we had a problem with Kabonge (a local variety) because it would take long to mature and required to be sprayed as it was prone to groundnut rosette virus disease. After losing several times, I gave up the crop yet it is the one which used to do well in our soil. When I joined ActionAid, I was given one basin of SERE nut 2 variety which I had heard of as being high yielding. When I planted it, I got three bags yet I had not sprayed in just two and half months. I took back the loan of 1 basin and sold two bags for 50,000 each and paid school fees for my daughter and my son. I continued borrowing and taking back the seed so that I expanded my production. I have now planted 1 acre of



groundnuts and 1 acre of maize with seed originally got from the bank. From the sale of my proceeds, I have bought myself a bull and I plan to buy another one next season so that I use them to expand the acreage. From the sale of proceeds from the improved groundnuts, I joined another group of women where we were given an improved goat for milk. My plan is to increase my production so that I send my children for further studies."

Seed banks are liberating

There is also reduced reliance on their male counterparts and thus increasing women's participation in decision making and reducing poverty related domestic violence. As Asanansi narrates: "We as women used to suffer because we had to beg for everything from the man. This would cause quarrels as sometimes the man could not provide what you wanted either because he had other more important issues, or because he did not have the money. But now I can sell a basin of groundnuts and buy a kilo of sugar for my visitor or other personal needs without relying on the man'. Also, there is an emerging trend of some women acquiring land as a result of the seed bank.

Power of smallholder women unlocked

By Sally Henderson, Programme Coordinator – ActionAid Australia

The Kapteret women farmer group greets us with drumming, singing and dancing. They are clothed in brightly striped dresses with big red sashes. The women farm in Kapchorwa District, the roof of Uganda. They are the rights holders in the Women Rights in Agriculture project which is implemented by the Tuban Organic Farmers Association, in partnership with ActionAid Uganda.

They have received multiple training sessions and most important of all now have land under their collective control, and vegetable seeds and an irrigation system is being installed. They tell us that the training has allowed them to be more systematic in their saving at household level and keeping records. They also have big plans for their field. Most of all, knowledge of their rights has allowed them to be more

confident and speak up at home when making decisions. They also shared with us an example of when a woman with five children showed up at the health clinic, and the nurse was very rude to her. They took the case to the district officials and the nurse had to formally apologize.

The power these women have has clearly been unlocked. They infect us with their enthusiasm and we all dance around vigorously outside.

We drive to their land where another group of women meet us. The road they say they insisted be leveled so that they can reach it more easily. They tell us that people used to live in this lower area but the violence of the Karimjong cattle rustlers forced them to shift to higher areas. Their raids are far less frequent now.

There is still much to be done, in this community and by these women, but you get the feeling that these women will not stop until they have eliminated poverty!



Sally Henderson greeted by the women who will not stop until poverty is ended.

ActionAid International Uganda

P. O. Box 676, Kampala
Plot 2514/2515 Ggaba Road
Tel: +256 (392) 220002/3
Fax: +256 (414) 510016
www.actionaid.org/uganda

Editorial team: Arthur Larok, Henry Nickson Ogwal, Jacob Rosdahl

