

2

The voices of the deaf:
Transformed lives

6

Human Rights, Gender
and HIV/AIDS.

8

Meet the sponsored
children of 1982

News

actionaid



ActionAid Uganda's Special Anniversary Issue, November 2012

STORIES OF CHANGE

Editorial: Stories of Change

As ActionAid marks 30 years in service for Human Dignity in Uganda in 2012, we are pleased to dedicate this edition of our newsletter to our partners and development associates numbering 77 in 49 districts and reaching thousands of people living in poverty and facing exclusion.

In response to our cardinal belief that poverty is a human rights violation caused by unequal power relations right from family to global levels, we operate on a twin logic - seeking to transform the *condition* and *position* of people living in poverty. In transforming the condition, we address immediate needs of people living in poverty and facing exclusion, while in transforming position, we focus on creating conditions for empowerment that enable people climb the decision making ladder and influence decisions that affect their lives.

In the same way we view change in both numerical and qualitative dimensions. For instance, the next five years we promise to secure the right to sustainable livelihood for 41,800 people; we promise to secure the rights of 40,000 women and 7,000 girls with regard to sexual reproductive rights, a violence free environment and control over their lives. But behind every figure there is an individual and so we investigate in depth how the changes come about and influence the rights of the individual woman, child or man. It is this reason that lends to the idea of *stories of change*!

Read the article about the Benet struggle for land and think how significant and far-reaching it is when Mzee Mwanga says "we never knew government could be taken to Court, now we know"! How can we not all learn from such a person?

This is what stories of change are: the tales from the tremendous work of our partners which show us the citizens behind the reasons why, after 30 years, ActionAid is still pivotal in the development of Uganda and why we need our partners.

A heartfelt Thank You goes to all partners of ActionAid.

From mountain of trouble to fountain of hope

By Aggrey Kibet, Coordinator, Kapchorwa Local Rights Programme



Women of Kwosir REFLECT circle after a meeting in Benet. They know their rights are important to them. Inset: Mzee Moses Mwanga, a former Chairperson of our partner Benet Lobby Group.

The indigenous minority Benet people ('Ndorobos') are found on the foot of Mt. Elgon, Kween District, Eastern Uganda. They have since 2002 and with support from ActionAid been in a protracted campaign to reclaim their land from Government following their eviction from this Mountain Forest they have occupied as their home for generations.

Their eviction follows a series of events starting with the declaration of the Mt.Elgon Forest as Crown land by colonialists in 1920 (this recognized the Benets but not their land rights) and later the gazettement of the mountain forest as a National Game park in 1993, all the while the Benets remained in this land. The forceful eviction through burning of their grass thatched huts and killing of livestock by forest park authorities, now Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA), of these hitherto forest fruit gatherers in 2002 opened the Pandora box as the people found themselves landless, dispossessed and in a state of hopelessness.

Mr. Mwanga Moses Chekwengu, aged 67 is a resident of Kwosir Parish, Kwosir sub-county of the greater Benet area. He was born, grew up and has known the forest and mountain all his life and now a key leader. He speaks of the cur-

rent struggle for their land and how it begun:

"I remember vividly the year was 2002. I had just woken up to go to our family garden. I heard wails from Women akin to attack by enemies. I saw people run down the Yatui slopes alarming and carrying their little belongings. The strange and unexpected had happened - the Park rangers had burnt 30 houses down and forced people to flee from their homes. Many animals were killed and some eaten by the park rangers but in the pandemonium that ensued, not much could be established as people and entire families ran for their lives. Several grass-thatched houses and food gardens have been destroyed and 52 head of cattle confiscated. At this point, all the people had assembled in several caves and a few host families. They were living in fear and uncertainty. It was catastrophic..."

The developments were a stark escalation in harassment by warders of the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) against peasants in the Yatui, Kwoti and Kapsekek parishes of Benet. There had been threats to evict people but the manner, pace and magnitude with which it was executed never prepared these blanket and skin

Continued on page2

...From mountain of trouble to fountain of hope

Continued from page 1

clad people for the harsh reality of the eviction. Many elders were traumatized and succumbed to the depression that followed the inhuman eviction.

In the protracted struggle, ActionAid together with Uganda Land Alliance, a consortium of over 40 NGOs vouching for the land rights of the marginalised people and populations in Uganda, were later to work with the Benets through a community supported litigation process that was the only hope for Benet people.

The day of reckoning was to come and on October 27, 2005. Hundreds of Benets made the gruelling 84 km journey from Benet sub-county to the High Court in Mbale town, west of their district. They were from all walks of life: young and old; mothers and daughters; cabbage farmers and cattle herders; basket weavers and honey gatherers; councillors and clan ritual specialists; all overwhelmed with feelings of anticipation and anxiety. Several questions rung in their mind: 'Would the verdict signal the reversal of our woes? Would their land, fought for physically and through efforts to mobilize public opinion, through advocacy directed towards MPs and decision makers be legally recognised? Would this mark the point of critical change from domination, discrimination and exclusion to entitlement, recognition of their way of life and security of person and property? Would state infringements end? Would our ancestral lands now comprised in Mt. Elgon

Forest National Park revert firmly?' the aging Mwanga recalled as his eyes pierced the empty sky lost in thought.

The court judgement was issued in the form of a Consent Judgement/Decree, which was arrived at by agreement between the parties to the case and was endorsed by the court, but settled in advance of full court proceedings. Amongst the terms of the Judgement was the recognition of the Benet community as the "historical and indigenous" inhabitants of the area; their right to live and conduct 'agricultural activities' in the areas they currently inhabit; and the right to immediate redress for imbalances in education, infrastructure, health and social services.

The Consent Judgement was hailed as a success - ActionAid, the Uganda Land Alliance and other CSOs saw this court victory as a vindication of an approach which places rights at the centre of their work. The Benet victory showed that powerful grassroots initiatives, coupled with the partnership solidarity of rights-based CSOs, can, through a legal strategy, bring about a change from marginality to entitlement for landless and vulnerable communities. It was a story of a small community organizing, fearlessly taking on the might of the Ugandan State and winning!

By supporting a grassroots organization, the Benet Lobby Group (BLG), ActionAid continues

to fulfil one of its key commitments - to work with and through people's organisations. The problems of the Benet is not all over yet, as over 400 families remain unsettled by Government in Yatui and Cheberen parishes but a key battle was won, as Mzee Mwanga sums: 'we never knew government could be taken to Court, now we know... with support of ActionAid we now know and are confident we have the ability and strength as a people to claim our rights...'

Today, ActionAid is working with the Benet community through our Local partner Organization, the Benet lobby group (BLG) to fight for respect and promotion of rights women Land rights and decision making processes at the household level. Despite women's contribution with over 80% of labour work, they are culturally perceived as 'looker-ons' in critical decisions around family farm management and use of farm proceeds.

To change this 150 women from Kwosir in Benet from 5 REFLECT-Circles are in the processes of having an irrigation system installed for them to undertake vegetable and horticultural farming. This is expected to give women an opportunity to showcase their farming, marketing, resource management, savings and credit and investment skills which should trigger more respect for them so they become major players at the household level with their spouses changing attitudes and embracing women as key particulars.

The voices of the deaf: Transformed lives

By Ndeezi Alex, Executive Director UNAD

Twelve years of partnership between Uganda National Association of the Deaf (UNAD) and ActionAid Uganda have ushered in significant changes in the lives of deaf people in the western and southern districts of Mbarara, Isingiro and Kyegegwa.

Even though poverty is a general problem affecting a wider section of the community, certain categories of persons in our society are most hard hit by the consequences of poverty owing to exposure to multiple levels of vulnerability, marginalization, discrimination and denial of access to opportunities. The situation of the Deaf requires special focus in the bracket of People with Disabilities due to the definitely glaring reality of inability to access information, knowledge and education which are primary requisites for overcoming poverty, ignorance and disease.

It is from this inhuman reality that the Uganda National Association of the Deaf and ActionAid twelve years ago entered into a partnership to create an enabling environment for the deaf to

exploit their potentials for self actualization. The initiative started with a survey which identified a lack of medium of communication as the basic impingement to deaf development. Structurally, it is lack of access to education, lack of access to information, marginalization and denial by society as the key factors responsible for the massive poverty among Ugandan's population of deaf persons estimated at 800,000.

The survey also identified lack of an engagement platform for the deaf as one of the major causes of poverty among deaf persons. Unlike the visually impaired-blind persons or physically handicapped persons who are easily seen and identified in the community, it is very difficult to identify a deaf person hence issues of deaf persons remain invisible and unattended to by the community, civic society and Government.

Twelve years on, the changes are visible in the socio-economic and cultural lives of deaf people and their families. More than 1,000 deaf people have gained sign language skills and knowledge. This has empowered them to

break out of exclusion and isolation from the community. Income generating activities have raised the status of a significant number of deaf persons especially women, while many deaf children have benefited from the tailor-made education infrastructure established by UNAD and ActionAid. With the technical support of ActionAid staff, a transformation plan developed and successfully implemented has led to some of the following key results:

- Deaf and hearing persons in the three districts have been trained in Sign language and are now able to communicate at family and community level.
- Awareness raising has resulted in greater acceptance of deaf persons as members of the community. Deaf people are now able to participate in community meetings, religious activities Governance discussions and leadership positions.

Continued on page 5

People's power as the enforcer of accountability in Nakalama.

NAMIGANDA HEALTH CENTRE TWO AS L MADE FOLLOW UP THEY HAVE START RENOUATION BUT ,IF YOVCOUNT IS LOT MONEY TO RENOUATION ONLY

The text message that revealed shoddy work at Nakalama Health Centre

In a routine monitoring in September 2012, women monitors armed with mobile phones from the regional Anti-Corruption Coalition Busoga (one of ACCU's partners) discovered that a new construction project at the Nakalama Health Centre III was in a sorry state.

They noticed that instead of a two roomed block with four windows the building was initially one big room with only two windows. And the structure, worth Shs. 10,000,000, was poorly constructed with a wrong mixture of sand and cement.

"The constructor used a ratio of one bag of cement to 8 wheel barrows of sand; instead of 1:4 as it should be," one of the monitors later told.

The women monitors sent a sms report to ACCU to notify of the shoddy work on the project. It was followed up with verification meetings with the Chief Administrative Officer to request for information on the works procurements, Departments of Engineering and Procurement at the District and Nakalama HCIII, but also consultations were made with the political leaders at both the district and Sub-county level who had reservations on the quality of the construction at the Health Center.

This was followed with a site verification exercise by the regional Anti Corruption Coalition Busoga/ACCU Team and the District Engineer in charge of constructions to measure if the size of the building and the specifications were as per the bills of quantities.



Some of the women monitors and ACCOB Coordinator with the Health Center Staff after the demolition of the structure, and fresh construction materials ready for a new construction.

The building was demolished by unknown people three days after the visit and new building material ferried to the construction site.

Poor public monitoring

During the verification, the Department Engineer during the verification in charge said to the anti-corruption representatives:

"You are the people who make our work look bad by complaining where it's not necessary"

The Department Engineer initially claimed that he used to monitor the construction, but later agreed that it is not possible for the department to monitor step by step because of lack of resources; however, he also said that he had monitored and confirmed that the working was going well.

The Coalition is still following up the case with the District to hold the contractor accountable for abusing contractual agreements and the Engineering department for not taking action despite complaints from both communities and the local leaders mostly politicians. To this effect letters have been sent to the District Chief Administrative Office, the Public Procurement and Disposal of Assets (PPDA) and IGG to follow up the case.

A woman monitor said:

"Finally we have a strong relationship with the leaders because uncovering this has showed our relevance"

The Anti-Corruption Coalition Busoga, one of the many Regional Anti-Corruption Coalitions that ACCU works with, trained a total of 80 Women monitors, and in the Nakalama sub county 10 women were trained as monitors and to follow both the education and health sector funds.



SMS against theft

In 2011 started a new project dubbed Gender Strategic Social Accountability by Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) with support from DANIDA and Action Aid (Denmark and Uganda). The Project emphasizes the use of mobile phones as an instrument to expose corruption. 640 women monitors were given mobile phones for the purpose of tracking and demanding accountability from duty bearers in eight districts, by monitoring the education and health sectors.

Each women monitor checks at least one health centre and one school twice a month. Cases are reported as text-messages and sent to a "sms-tracking machine", a piece of software that collects the messages. The reports are represented on a map to show the statistics of theft cases by sector, region and form of corruption; all of which are central in setting the advocacy issues for engaging both state and non-state actors in ensuring accountability and good service delivery. Reports are only seen by ACCU staff to ensure the women's safety.

The outstanding impact of the project is the capacity building and empowerment of women to demand for accountability and cause good governance responsive behavior from the public office holders (Government) in the utilization of public resources. The project emphasises working together with local leaders and they appreciate the project.

Health and educations sectors are the most affected by lack of accountability and the women are the first line victims of corruption. Hence, they know how important accountability is in the sectors and are self-driven to create change.

Anti-Corruption Coalition Uganda (ACCU) has for the past 10 years actively engaged both the state and non-state actors in the fight against corruption on local, regional and national levels.

Hope for Smallholder Farmers through an innovative 'Farmer to farmer Extension Model'

By Robert Okuku and Kagoro Godfrey

Farmer to farmer extension model is an initiative supported by Action Aid International Uganda and implemented by Masindi Seed Growers Association to reach out to smallholder farmers through mobilization, sensitization, training farmers in best agronomic practices, post harvest handling and market linkages for increased crop productivity and house hold incomes to for sustainable livelihoods.

The model addresses the whole crop value chain to enable farmers optimize profits by following good practices and processes that promote increased crop productivity and quality assurance for sustainable markets.

Smallholder farmers are identified, trained in best practices, selection of right seed and agronomic practices. The main crop being planted by the majority of the farmers is Maize that yields 2000kgs of seed grain per acre. Trial gardens code named Demo gardens have been established in all six parishes of Pakanyi and Bwijanga sub counties and the results were above by 1000kgs from the ordinary yield. Coupled with this is the evolving seed scheme inbuilt into the model to keep affordable seed through the seasons within the farmers reach.

Farmer to farmer extension has popularized the construction of maize cribs by using locally available materials to improve crop handling for better quality seed grain for onward market linkages. In the crib there is crop aeration which reduces pests and the stands prevent rodents from entering. The cribs put the farmers at better comparative advantage in terms of volume, quality and therefore strengthening farmers' ability to negotiate for better prices. This has enabled them supply to Southern Sudan and to World Food Program.

Collective marketing has been emphasized as a bulking process to accumulate volumes and standardize the crops to the same quality parameters for better marketability. The model has been successful because where many farmers groups have failed to market their produce, the space created helps keep the produce till the market price is favorable. In 2011, 240 tons of maize grain was stocked and sold at 900/=@kg to World Food Program and other grain exporters.

Bitaro Wilson is one of the beneficiaries of the maize crib structures and says:

"Since I joined MSGA as a small holder farmer my life has not been the same again. I have learnt to select seed for successive seasons, plant with attention to the cropping system we were taught and have got bigger yields year after year. Before this training we used to get 600 kg's per acre but today many of us can afford to get 2000 kg's per acre, bulk or sell when prices are favorable. I can afford most of the basic



A demonstration garden established in Kiruli Village, Kyakamese Parish, Pakanyi Sub-county



Bitra Wilson (left) with one of his peers by his maize crib

needs for my family and also take my children to school."

The system curtails cheating on weights and measures; eases access to finance at all levels in the marketing chain; moderates seasonal price variability and promote instruments to mitigate price risks. It also reduces the need for the Government to intervene in agricultural markets, and reduces the cost of such interventions if needed.

The farmers have storage facilities and can sell with a good profit margin once market prices improve.

Looking ahead, the Masindi farmers will introduce soy bean as an alternative crop and ecological practices for smaller pieces of land. Group savings and loans will help diversifying income sources. And the farmers need to strengthen research in order to give regular and systematic feedback to research institutions.

The Women's Rights Centre: A facility for survivors of Gender Based Violence

By Harriet Gimbo

In 2008 Action Aid established three Women's Reception Centers in Pallisa, Nebbi and Mubende districts to act as one-stop-center for support to women that suffer domestic violence. To date with support from DFID and UNFPA we now have 9 with additional ones in Kumi, Katakwi, Amuru, Kween, Lira and Bwaise.

The idea of protection centers was conceived after the successful launch of the Women Won't Wait campaign in 2007 that mobilized women, girls and other stakeholders to demand for appropriate laws, policies, programmes and funding to end violence against women and girls linked to HIV/AIDS. The gap was identified from the lack of safe facilities for survivors who reported to police and had no custody due to fear to return home, rejection and ridicule from close relatives, community members and peers.

The purpose of the centers is to provide integrated services for gender based violence survivors and sexual assault, promote standardized coordination and program implementation efforts relating to GBV prevention and response, safe shelter and support services to battered women, their dependent children and to empower women to make informed choices about their future. The centers provides information, legal redress and psychosocial support, crisis intervention, representation in courts, referrals for medical therapy, rehabilitation and resettlement and first aid to the survivors of violence especially that linked to HIV/AIDS.

Cases handled include physical battering, sexual violence, psychological violence and severe neglect as well as traditional/customary forms of violence such as early marriages and widow inheritance among others.

What happens at the Reception Centre?

The centres are equipped with legal personnel, social workers, and counselors who are trained in all forms of gender based violence and case management. They work in close cooperation with the local authorities such as the District Probation Officer, the Ugandan Police Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU), and forensic medical officers to ensure sufficient evidence collection to avoid abortion of cases from clients whose cases

risk 'getting lost' in the system and in between offices.

At the centre, a client is offered shelter only after all other alternatives such as family and friends have been explored and are neither viable nor available. Collaborative safety planning and self awareness skills are routinely integrated into counseling processes and training needs of choices of business for resettlement and rehabilitation are assessed and responded to accordingly.



Told by Jane, the aunt of Nassozi in Mubende: "In 2006 I decided to move back to the village and take care of my mother on her last days. The household contained Jimmy, my mother's nephew, and his young daughter Najjingo, and my niece Nassozi. After a while I noticed that something was wrong with Nassozi; she had a blood stained dress after I had sent her on an errand to Jimmy's house .

I reported to police and took Nassozi to the hospital, but I didn't have enough money to pay for the medical examination, so I went back without success. Jimmy was furious; he threatened me and the girls to keep quiet. But to our luck the police had reported my case to the Centre in Mubende, the staff responded immediately and in collaboration with the police they ensured that Jimmy was arrested. They also took Nassozi for medical examinations and HIV tests. Jimmy was sentenced to imprisonment to date. I and my niece stayed at the centre's safe shelter for three days where we received counseling and medical treatment. "For the first time in many years I feel comfortable", Jane concludes with a relieved smile.

.....The voices of the deaf: Transformed lives

Continued from page 2

- Two (2) units for the deaf currently with more than 150 deaf children have been constructed to enable deaf children access education in integrated schools. Some of the early beneficiaries of the project have studied up to University level - something that was unheard of before the project started. More than 10 deaf people from the project areas have acquired University education with sign language interpreters who facilitate communication in sign language.
- Income generating activities of families with deaf members have also been supported.
- At national level, the project has built the organizational capacity of Uganda National Association of the Deaf in the areas of strategic planning, management, leadership, policy formulation, fundraising and financial management.
- As a result of ActionAid support to UNAD, the organisation has managed to attract other funders to fund related projects of deaf persons. The capacity of UNAD has enabled the Organization to influence national level policies on deafness in favor of deaf persons.
- With the support of ActionAid, UNAD successfully lobbied for simultaneous Sign language interpretation of the News on National Televisions in Uganda.
- UNAD has also succeeded in persuading Government to start two secondary schools of the deaf and ten (10) Units of the deaf in other parts of Uganda using AAIU supported project as a model.
- UNAD has also participated in influencing policies and legislation in favor of PWDs/deaf persons using the support from Action Aid International -Uganda. These policies and laws are in areas of access to education, economic opportunities and participation in decision making.
- Deaf people at district level have also been mobilized to form Associations and community Groups e.g. The district Association of the Deaf in Kyegegwa has 105 members.



School for deaf children. Access to education is a huge problem for Uganda's 800,000 deaf persons

Human Rights, Gender and HIV/AIDS. Support to infected persons in Nsinze.

By Ednance Kiiza, Sam Nkenga and Harriet Gimbo

During the last 7 years, NSHAWA's (Nsinze Sub-county HIV/AIDS Worker's Association) work has reached over 3,000 People living with HIV and AIDS and members of their households in Namutumba, mostly women. Our work has enhanced the capacity of communities in agro processing, multiplication of improved seed and animal traction for expansion of land. This has in turn led to improved nutrition from the extra income earned, better health seeking behaviors and bonding of people living with HIV and AIDS in Namutumba.

Transforming societies through community action

Through STAR (Societies Tackling AIDS through Rights), People living with HIV and AIDS have been mobilized to an integrated response to HIV and AIDS using a tri-focal lens of gender, human rights and HIV/AIDS; facilitating the links with poverty, vulnerability and injustice. STAR is a concept of circles (groups) of 25-30 persons from the community for joint planning, reflection and collective action. In the circles, communities are mobilizing themselves for action against poor and wrong health priorities, and some of the key outcomes are in the fields of advocacy, economic support and community care and bonding.

Advocacy led to a cell counting machine

Unlike in the non-STAR communities, STAR communities are able to identify and analyze their community needs and problems and develop actions that feed into, or influence, the local government planning and budgeting. For instance, the group efforts yielded a CD4 count machine (the number of CD4 cells reflects the health of the body's immune system, and is very important in HIV/AIDS treatment). After 2 years of advocacy the machine is now stationed at Nsinze Health Centre IV. Before people had to travel to Iganga - 69 kms away!

Economic support

All the STAR circle members are actively participating in economic activities either at group level or individual level. Some of the economic activities include piggery, poultry, cattle keeping, handcraft making among others. To curb the food insecurity among single mothers, 150 women received seeds of

improved maize, of which 100 were single child mothers. This project is expected to benefit 1300 people.

Breaking the stigma

STAR circles have been avenues for People living with HIV and AIDS to fellowship through group counseling. As a result the members have become closer to each other and this bond has given them psychological comfort as other circle members are concerned about their plight. The approach has thus endeavored to revive the traditional African community support mechanism and enabled members to break the silence about their status and self-stigma. The open membership, with minimal requirements of entry, has also reduced the fear, inferiority, hopelessness, loneliness and misery that surrounded people before they joined a mixed group where status did not matter. Home-based care, reducing stigma and discrimination and linkages with religious groups is all ensuring that positive women find more understanding environments.

In addition to that STAR Circles have proved to be functional learning centers at community level. Many STAR members report to be well informed about HIV prevention, care and treatment and are guides to other community members in need of information.

Gender Based Violence and HIV and AIDS

There is a link between HIV and gender based violence. Hence, community dialogues have been organized to help men and women, local leaders, religious leaders and official structures like police to address the issues. Between 2011 and 2012, a total of 914 persons were sensitized. Though laws are in place to protect the girl and women right's violation, the enforcement of such laws has been poor but prioritized actions are improving enforcement.

Next steps for NSHAWA are to scale up to address the intersection between HIV and AIDS and gender based violence, strengthen the mobilization of People living with HIV/AIDS to engage with the local government in Namutumba for prevention and responding to violence and HIV/AIDS, and address structural causes of inequality and injustice.



HIV and AIDS can be a new beginning

In 2002 Kisebye tested HIV positive.

"I lost hope," she says. Today she is able to pay school fees for her children.

When she found herself HIV-positive, she was counselled to work within a well-known ActionAid approach that links adult learning to empowerment.

"I was advised to form a REFLECT Circle for support," says Kisebye who is former Chairperson of Nsinze Sub-County HIV/AIDS Workers Association (NSHAWA). From the group she received training in home-based care and counselling and today she talks to and encourages others who, like she did, are finding it hard to come to terms with their HIV status. As a result from the empowering work in the group she became the proud owner of a poultry farm that currently has 32 chickens. To supplement her income from the chicken, she also grows mushrooms and groundnuts. The physical evidence of it all is a permanent house in her compound.

Kisebye confesses that she was one of those people who thought that HIV/AIDS was the end of the world. Ever since she joined the PLHA group, she is a changed and empowered woman who lives to preach the gospel of positive living to others.

Griki Primary School in Kween is proof. School feeding is critical for Quality Education

It is the 4th day of May 2012, the sky shines bright; there is singing, *ululations* and broad smiles all over the air as the women, men and children welcome a landmark - the commissioning of Griki Primary School in Kween district, opening its doors to 700 children of this formerly displaced community. One thing strikes though, the broad and healthy smiles of the children... the smiles of well fed young learners who have grown from initial enrolment of 43 in January to 700 in May 2012 - thanks to a Community Managed School Feeding Programme providing a midday meal supported by ActionAid.

Who are the Griki community?

Griki community is a fragile people living in a semi-arid pastoral corridor straddled between Greater Sebei and Karamoja regions. They belong the Sabiny-Kalenjin tribe of Mt. Elgon and Kenya's Central Rift Valley. The 7,000 strong community is located in Griki subcounty, Kween District. Like many other neighbours to Karamojong and Pokot communities, the Griki had been displaced by marauding rustlers for over 40 years.

The previously successful pastoral community numbering over 15,000 people had been reduced to beggars in all the places they were displaced to in Kenya, Western Uganda, Sudan and Mt. Elgon slopes. Relative Peace finally returned in 2007 thanks to a protracted peace process support by ActionAid Uganda under Kapchorwa Development Area now a Local Rights Programme.

Following joint consultations and assessment involving the first 200 returnees of the Griki area by ActionAid in 2007, fundraising appeals were made in for resources to settle the community and put up basic housing and social services like Health and Schools. The idea was to support the communities to be confident enough to live on their land and start to rebuild their lives.

In 2011, ActionAid worked with the community and its partners to establish a decent and conducive learning environment for the over 700 Griki primary school children whose hopes for an education were diminishing due to lack of facilities. Though communities had attempted to put up a make-shift primary school, there were no teachers and no food for the children. Most children preferred to go up the slopes of the mountain to do manual work with parents in exchange for food. The future of a whole generation was certainly bleak. This is the story of the evolution of Griki primary school and its School Feeding Program.

ActionAid and the people in Griki recognized that due to poor nutrition and inadequate food, hungry children have problems concentrating in class and participating during learning activities, and are often anxious to leave school to find something to eat if they can. This not only contributes to high school dropout rates but also to declining nutritional and health status, poor education standards and consequently declining human capital essential for community development as aptly put by David Chemorion, aged 14 in Primary Seven:

I have joined and dropped out of school 2 times; each time repeating a class. I should have sat Primary Seven 2 years ago. However, due to lack of food at home and at school, I lost all that school time. My family lived in Kapkwata (on the upper slopes of Mt.Elgon) and only returned in 2008. I have always worked in peoples gardens. I joined Korite Primary School in primary five but experienced hunger at school - I hated school and felt I should abandon it all together. But when Griki primary School opened in 2012, I was overjoyed that we had soya porridge at school and a meal at lunch time. We have a grinding meal and food harvested by our parents and children in our school store. I love school and always look forward to the next day.

I hope to study and become an Engineer and construct a school like Griki for other children"

The story of David is telling experience of what school meals means for Children especially poor children whose families have to struggle to make ends meet let alone attain food security.

Other related community based initiatives supported by Actionaid

ActionAid has identified this as an important intervention and so beyond the school that we constructed with support from philanthropic UK family of Sarah and Richard Skelt, we also supported a school garden project, a store and kitchen to make Griki Primary School self sufficient. To date the School community led by parents and supported by the school management committee and school administration have harvested 5,200 kg's of Maize from their own school garden and with their grinding mill, they are assured of food for the rest of year and ultimately sustained enrolment for the 700 school children more than half of whom are girl children.

Conclusion on school feeding programme

Griki primary school experience and success reveal that Government must support feeding at its schools more actively and empower parents to be at the centre of the feeding programme. If quality education, sustained enrolment and completion targets are to be achieved as Millennium Development Goals, the conclusion is adroitly summed up by the statement by Ms Margaret Chelimo, Head Mistress Greek River Primary School in Griki Subcounty: "Quality primary education by Government is merely lip service in Universal primary schools without mid-day school meals for children. And parents must play an important part".



A community volunteer and parent (Mr. Steven Yeko) shows off School feeding harvest worth 5,200 kg's in the store built with ActionAid support at Greek River school.



David Chemorion (left) smiles with his friend after a mid-day break!

