

ACFODE QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

JAN-MARCH 2025.



One of ACFODE's GBV Champions second right receiving a sewing machine from our partners.

EDITORIAL.

In the realm of gender equality, Action for Development (ACFODE) stands tall as a leading force in Uganda. This renowned organization, driven by a member-based approach, has dedicated itself to the advancement of women's rights and the promotion of gender equality. Over the span of four decades, ACFODE has tirelessly advocated for women's empowerment, eradicated violence against women and girls, and tirelessly fought for a more balanced society. Anchored by a strong vision, mission, core values, and purpose, ACFODE remains unwavering in its commitment to stability and sustainability, igniting a path towards gender equality as she celebrates 40 years.

VISION.

A just society where gender equality is a reality.

MISSION.

To Empower Women, Youth and Girls through social and policy change that fosters a culture where they are accorded equal opportunities..

CORE VALUES.

Integrity.

Learning.

Volunteerism.

Respect.

Teamwork.

Equity and fairness.

CORE PURPOSE.

Advocacy for gender equality and equity. Women, Youth and Girls actively engage in and benefit from social, political, leadership and economic opportunities and are free from any form of violence or discrimination.

Strategic Engagements.

ACFODE E.D Speaks at Swedish Seminar on Navigating Shrinking Civic Spaces.



Ms. Regina Bafaki ED, at ACFODE giving her submissions during the seminar.

Stockholm, Sweden: Ms. Regina Bafaki, Executive Director (ACFODE), represented her organization at a pivotal seminar hosted by the Swedish Foundation for Human Rights, which took place in Sweden Stockholm. The event focused on the alarming global trend of diminishing civic space and its impact on civil society organizations.

The seminar brought together activists, policymakers, and academics to discuss the challenges faced by civil society actors in various contexts, with a particular focus on Uganda. In her presentation, Ms. Bafaki shared critical insights drawn from the Ugandan experience, where restrictive regulations threaten advocacy efforts and undermine civic engagement.

"In Uganda, we are witnessing a tightening of the civic space, where laws and policies increasingly hinder the ability of organizations like ours to operate effectively," Ms. Bafaki stated. She highlighted the particular challenges faced by women in advocating for their rights and participating in political processes in such restrictive environments.

Despite these hurdles, Ms. Bafaki emphasized the resilience of civil society actors and the opportunities that remain for women's advocacy. *"While the landscape is challenging, it is crucial that we find innovative ways to navigate these restrictions and continue our work—empowering women to claim their rights and engage in political dialogue."*

The seminar also explored the potential for collaboration between Swedish and Ugandan civil society organizations. Participants discussed strategies to sustain advocacy efforts during times of political transition and the importance of international solidarity in overcoming local challenges.

Ms. Bafaki urged attendees to support initiatives that strengthen civic engagement and protect fundamental human rights, stating, *"Together, we can create an environment where civil society thrives, and voices are not silenced."*

Transformative social and cultural change

ACFODE and Alight's Transformative Partnership in the Fight Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV)



One of ACFODE's GBV Champions, second right receiving a sewing machine from our partners.

In an initiative to combat the pervasive issue of Gender-Based Violence (GBV), ACFODE (Action for Development) has partnered with Alight and RESDA (Refugee Empowerment for Sustainable Development in Africa) to empower young girls, particularly those affected by GBV. The collaboration has benefited both out-of-school girls and those in school.

Through this partnership, 11 girls—3 nationals and 8 refugees—have completed a vocational training program in tailoring. Referred by ACFODE to RESDA, these young women have gained invaluable skills that will not only allow them to earn a living but also position them as leaders and role models within their communities. Each girl received a

startup kit from Alight, containing essential tools needed to commence their small tailoring businesses, reinforcing their newfound independence.

Gloria Katinisa, a member of the Listeners' Club from Central Village in Itambabiniga Zone, expressed her gratitude: *“I had lost hope after dropping out of school due to GBV issues. ACFODE has given me hope again. Now, I am excited to be self-employed after receiving my training and startup kit.”*

Likewise, Fraja Iranzi, a teenage mother who faced severe challenges after experiencing GBV, reflected on her journey: *“I was in despair, considering suicide due to harassment from my parents. But thanks to ACFODE, I received the support I needed, and now, I have the means to care for myself and my child.”*

The initiative also supported 57 girls from Itambabiniga, Bukerere, and Kaborogota Primary Schools, providing them with much-needed scholastic materials. Distributed in February 2025, these resources were aimed at alleviating the barriers to education faced by vulnerable girls. The selection process was carried out with the help of dedicated teachers who identified the most at-risk students, with particular attention to those in GBV Prevention Clubs and girls living with disabilities.

The scholastic materials distributed ranged from school bags and books to sanitary products aiming to ensure that these girls can attend school regularly and participate fully in their education. Teacher Esperance from Bukerere Primary School highlighted the positive impact: *“I thank ACFODE and Alight for their good collaboration in supporting girls. This has reduced my workload, as I previously received many cases of girls lacking sanitary kits.”*

The positive effects of this partnership extends beyond individual benefits. By empowering girls through education and vocational training, ACFODE and Alight are actively working to break the cycles of poverty and violence, by equipping these girls with the confidence, skills, and resources needed for sustainability both at individual and community level.

ACFODE Champions 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence in Kasese.

ACFODE organized a series of impactful activities for the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence (GBV), marking the global campaign that aims to end violence against women and girls.

Under the theme "Towards Beijing +30: Unite to End Violence Against Women and Girls," ACFODE's initiatives reached approximately 1,291 individuals (743 females and 548 males) in both settlement and host communities.

The campaign included community awareness sessions, drama shows in five selected churches, and outreach in local marketplaces. These efforts disseminated critical information on various forms of GBV, its effects, and referral pathways for timely reporting and management of cases.

The drama shows, led by listener's club members, model couples, and community facilitators, provided an engaging platform for participants to witness and reflect on the contrast between peaceful homes and those plagued by violence.

Community members were encouraged to identify common forms of violence and to actively participate in creating solutions. Kamanyi Hellen from Rukiga village shared her experience: *"Parenting in a marketplace can be overwhelming, and I often felt unsure of how to manage both my work and family. After attending the awareness session, I now have a better understanding of how to access support through referral pathways and how to raise my children in such a challenging environment. ACFODE has given me practical tools and the confidence to navigate these struggles."*

Expressions of gratitude echoed throughout the community. Pastor Byamungu from the EPCB Church in Central Village highlighted the importance of the drama performances

"On behalf of our church, I would like to express our sincere gratitude to ACFODE for their impactful awareness sessions on positive parenting and domestic violence prevention. These shows have broadened our perspectives, and encouraged deep reflection on the roles and responsibilities of parents and children."

Youth participation was also a crucial focus of the campaign, as attendees were encouraged to resist negative peer influences, including drug and alcohol abuse, which can lead to rights violations. They were motivated to engage in productive ventures that enhance personal well-being and foster conflict resolution, positioning themselves as peace ambassadors within their communities. ACFODE's initiatives during the 16 Days of Activism reflect a commitment to promoting gender equality and preventing violence.

ACFODE Conducts Baseline Survey to Address Gender-Based Violence and Foster Peace



Community members are attending the survey exercise conducted by ACFODE.

ACFODE conducted an exploratory study aimed at uncovering how existing social and gender norms contribute to violence and influence peaceful co-existence in refugee and host communities. The comprehensive baseline survey was conducted in three phases—preparatory activities, data collection, and analysis—and engaged a diverse group of 306 community members, including men, women, youth, and 132 children.

Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study sought to capture the varied experiences and realities of individuals within these communities. The researchers employed a stratified random sampling technique to ensure the inclusion of different subgroups, thereby enhancing the understanding of their unique peace needs amid ongoing challenges.

Key findings from the survey highlighted significant issues, including unequal participation in leadership roles, low acceptance of women's leadership in decision-making, pervasive gender discrimination, and heightened concerns over gender-based violence (GBV).

The report stressed the necessity for targeted interventions to address these critical areas, including the promotion of mindset transformation, establishment of safe spaces for GBV reporting.

“Addressing the root causes of violence requires a multi-faceted approach, and our study indicated the complex dynamics at play within these communities,” said ACFODE’s project coordinator.

Recommendations from the study emphasize the importance of promoting positive parenting as a means to foster peaceful co-existence and breaking the cycle of violence.

ACFODE also plans to implement community engagement initiatives that focus on educating young people and women about social norms, thereby minimizing violence in households. The objective is to highlight the significance of shared leadership and the equitable distribution of resources to pave the way for a safer, more inclusive environment.

ACFODE Introduces New Civil Peace Service Program to District Officials



ACFODE staff and District officials after the introduction of the Civil Peace Service Program in Kyegegwa District.

ACFODE held a significant meeting with District officials to introduce a new program “*Civil Peace Service (CPS) program*”, aimed at fostering social and gender transformation in Uganda's refugee and host communities. With a gathering of 40 participants, including district leadership, representatives from the Office of the Prime Minister, UNHCR, and community stakeholders, the session aimed to highlight the program's goals and expected outcomes.

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) of Kyegegwa District emphasized the timeliness of the CPS program, commending ACFODE for its dedication to promoting peace and addressing the social-cultural barriers that limit women's rights. He urged the organization to leverage existing community structures, assuring full district support for the program.

The CPS program focuses on empowering men and women alike, building local peace structures, and preventing gender-based violence through community engagement and resource equity. Key interventions to be implemented include mental health support for

GBV survivors, community engagement initiatives with youth and parents on the negative effects of social norms, and the establishment of safe spaces for reporting and alliances.

Discussions also revolved around findings from a reference study which identified barriers to women's participation in leadership and resource allocation disputes between refugees and host communities. Participants highlighted the pressing need for alternative conflict resolution strategies and tailored training programs for women leaders to understand laws and policies related to gender-based violence and property rights.

As the meeting concluded, participants reaffirmed their commitment to assist ACFODE in fostering positive change, urging concerted efforts towards inclusive community dialogues and sustainable resource management in a collaborative approach to construct a peaceful future for all.

Leadership Development

Empowering BGCUL Through Organizational Development Training



Some of the participants sharing their experiences during the training.

ACFODE took a significant step towards enhancing the capacity of the Busoga Growers Cooperative Union Limited (BGCUL) by conducting Phase Two of an Organizational Development Training. On March 11th and 12th, 2025,

This training was built based on the groundwork laid in the previous year, combining efforts from ACFODE and the cooperative to fortify the foundations of governance, leadership, and organizational management.

With 28 participants in attendance, including 25 representatives from BGCUL's board, management, and primary societies, the training focused on engaging leaders in responsibility checks, refining the cooperative's aspirations, and strategizing to move the union forward.

Key discussions revolved around the cooperative's bylaws, with Ms. Kasaija Josephine the facilitator of the training, addressing member concerns about using shareholder contributions for administrative costs. She emphasized the need for better education regarding these bylaws to alleviate fears and enhance transparency.

Participants recognized that many members joined the cooperative without fully understanding the foundational rules, leading to unrealistic expectations about financial incentives. Ms. Josephine further argued that a shift in focus is necessary; the emphasis should be on ensuring all existing members comprehend their commitments, fostering a more dedicated and engaged membership base.

A critical aspect of the discussions involved the cooperative's vision and mission statements, particularly the pursuit of food security. Participants learned about ongoing initiatives to promote subsistence agriculture, with Mr. John Gaswagga one of the leaders of the groups announcing plans to integrate food security programs across primary societies. Recognizing the importance of aligning activities with the cooperative's mission, the group agreed to include food security more prominently in their strategies. objectives.

The workshop also addressed the need for crop specialization, exploring suggestions on focusing resources on maize, coffee, and rice, crops that are deemed most viable in the region.

Discussions unveiled contrasting views on crop potential within the Busoga area, leading to a consensus on prioritizing maize, rice, and coffee while conducting a situational analysis to assess market potential and advantages.

Some of the District Specific Updates

Girl Child Education Sensitization: A sensitization meeting at Acii Primary School emphasized the importance of girl child education. Parents were encouraged to ensure their children, both boys and girls, attend school with adequate scholastic materials.

A youth convention at Acii Church of Uganda addressed early marriage and teenage pregnancy, engaging approximately 200 youth along with religious, local council, and cultural leaders. The civic educators used this convention to speak about the importance of young people in decision making spaces.

KAMWENGE DISTRICT

The civic educators from Biguli Sub county have continued sensitization on collective community participation. The team mobilized residents to take part in the recently concluded Electoral Commission Update Exercise. They collaborated with EC officers to ensure community members verified their details on the National Voters' Register. They have also continued awareness campaigns on gender equality, community participation, and women and youth involvement in leadership.

Drama Show at Acii Market: A drama show titled "Support Women in Leadership" was staged at Acii Market to raise awareness about women's political participation. Approximately 80 people attended the event.

Engaging Youth Groups for Awareness on Women's Leadership: They have organized youth group meetings to raise awareness about the role of young women in leadership and elections. Two meetings have been conducted, with the expectation of increased female participation in leadership positions.

The civic educators in Amolator District have done the following:

Civic Education for VSLA Groups: Civic education was conducted for four VSLA groups—Ogen Rwot, Atek Ilwak, Obanga Atwero, and Opali Youth Group. Members were encouraged to verify their details on the national voters' register to participate in upcoming elections. Women's groups were also mobilized and sensitized on the Parish

Integration of Civic Education in Parish Development Model Meetings

Seven Parish Development Model meetings have been held and the civic educators have incorporated civic education on women's political participation. This initiative has empowered women with the necessary information to make informed decisions and actively seek leadership roles.

KABERAMAIDO DISTRICT

The civic educators in Kaberamaido District have done the following:

Addressing Domestic Violence: Three cases of domestic violence, including wife beating, child neglect, and financial control issues, were referred to the Community Development Officer (CDO) for resolution through guidance and counseling.

Sensitization on Government Programs: Civic educators conducted a sensitization meeting at Aminakita VSLA group on government programs, increasing awareness of the requirements and benefits of the Parish Development Model.

Proactive Integration of Civic Education:

Instead of waiting for ACFODE-organized barazas, the sub-county leadership has proactively integrated civic education into various community meetings. This approach has increased awareness about women's and youth's role in leadership. "We believe that no meeting should be wasted; every opportunity is a chance to educate the community on the importance of women's and female youth's role in leadership." - Kyatega Subcounty Senior Assistant Secretary

The civic educators from Kyatega Sub County have undertaken the following initiatives:

Utilizing Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Groups: They have engaged VSLA groups as platforms to encourage women's political participation and to grow their savings groups. As a result, three women-led groups, Katamba Women's Group, Tutugukye VSLA Group, and Kyakikoba VSLA Group have been registered, enhancing their visibility and giving them the opportunity to benefit from government programs.

Mobilizing Women into VSLA Groups: Women were mobilized into five VSLA groups—Abalang, Maktic, Obanga Ber, Ocan Oyere, and Oriamo Widows Group. Two of these groups (Abalang and Maktic) have already benefited from the Parish Development Model.

Economic Empowerment

ACFODE and JESE Empower Women Coffee Entrepreneurs in Kasese Through Mentorship Training.



Some of the coffee producers during the training.

ACFODE has partnered with Joint Efforts to Save the Environment (JESE) to launch a mentorship program aimed at enhancing the socio-economic contributions of women coffee entrepreneurs in Kasese district. The project, titled *“Increasing Economic Security and Opportunity for Women in Cooperatives,”* addresses the unique challenges faced by women in the coffee sector, including environmental factors.

The mentorship program targeted women from the *Muhokya Farmers’ Cooperative Society*, which specializes in coffee roasting, and the *Katulu Farmers’ Cooperative Society*, focused on green coffee buying and selling. The initiative sets out to equip these women with the necessary tools to overcome obstacles and grow their enterprises.

The program began with a meeting involving the business committee of the Mount Rwenzori Cooperative Union (MRCFCU) Board of Directors and key staff members which served to align the union's business strategy with the goals of the women's groups. The MRCFCU board expressed appreciation to ACFODE for its continuous support, pledging resources such as working space, utilities, and marketing assistance, ensuring a conducive environment for women's businesses to thrive.

Following this meeting, a session with the Muhokya Farmers' Cooperative Society was held, where nine women shared their experiences. The group's chairperson conveyed heartfelt gratitude to ACFODE for its impactful support, including the provision of essential packaging materials that improved their brand image. During this interactive session, mentees expressed their loyalty to their group and a willingness to contribute to shared needs. They identified key challenges, such as high marketing costs, inadequate roasting tools, and unclear product branding, while also recognizing opportunities to enhance their production capacity.

The mentorship program also reached the Katulu Farmers' Cooperative Society, where members expressed optimism about trading prospects despite not having done so yet. The session highlighted challenges, including the devastating impact of stormy rains and hailstones on coffee fields, leading to significant production losses. Discussions focused on pressing issues such as inadequate crop financing, limited marketing skills, and insufficient storage space, with the effects of climate change worsening their situations.

However, there was a renewed commitment among participants to dedicate themselves to their group objectives and work collaboratively to overcome the challenges facing their coffee enterprises.

Through this comprehensive mentorship initiative, ACFODE and JESE are not only empowering women in the coffee sector but also fostering a culture of resilience and collaboration, paving the way for sustainable economic development and meaningful contributions to their communities in Kasese district.

Empowering Women Cooperators in Kasese: ACFODE's Comprehensive Support Program

ACFODE, with support from Women Strong International, is making significant strides in enhancing the economic security of women cooperators in Kasese district. The organization has implemented a wide range of activities aimed at building the capacity of women involved in social enterprises, resulting in marked improvements in their business skills, confidence, and overall economic stability.

Through the project, ACFODE has facilitated several training sessions, including topics such as the social enterprise approach, financial management, record keeping, marketing strategies, and gender mindset change for both women cooperators and their spouses. Additionally, exposure visits to Fort Portal and specialized training in coffee value addition have expanded their knowledge and skills.

A recent experience-sharing forum provided a vital platform for women cooperators to highlight their successes, challenges, and recommendations for further support. Presentations from the women's groups illustrated the impact of ACFODE's initiatives.

The Piggery Group, established in December 2023, reported their success in selling piglets and meat, which has improved household incomes and provided organic manure for community gardens. They emphasized the project's role in reducing Gender-Based Violence (GBV) by promoting community togetherness and good behavior in children.

Similarly, the Goat Rearing Group showcased their growth from 18 to 53 goats and the importance of their enterprise in enhancing household incomes and combating poverty—a major driver of GBV in their community. They requested support from ACFODE for permanent housing to combat theft and protect their livestock.

The Grocery Enterprise Group, focused on grocery sales, reported on their growth and its positive influence on reducing domestic violence in their homes and community. They called for additional training and financial support to strengthen their operations.

The Coffee Farmers Group shared their experiences in coffee roasting and sales, noting increased production and improved packaging. They highlighted their contribution to reducing poverty and GBV, emphasizing that training sessions with spouses have been crucial in fostering joint ownership of coffee.

In remarks made during the forum, the DCDO of Kasese commended ACFODE for empowering women in the region and suggested involving Community Development Officers (CDOs) to boost the support and monitoring efforts. He emphasized the need for transparency and accountability in the projects while urging ACFODE to extend its outreach to more women in the district.

ACFODE's efforts continue to create lasting impacts by equipping women with skills to engage in profitable social enterprises, tackling deep-rooted negative social issues, and improving overall well-being.