



Breaking Through, Building Up and Binding

Q1 NEWSLETTER

eNewsletter

January–March, 2026

VOL: 1

ACFODE Hosts SIDA Delegation

On March 12, 2026, Action for Development (ACFODE) welcomed a delegation from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency to Kyegegwa District, not just for a visit, but for a closer look at what impact truly feels like on the ground.

Led by ACFODE's Executive Director, Regina Bafaki, the visit unfolded as a powerful journey into the organization's work among refugee and host communities. What began as a formal engagement quickly evolved into a demonstration of how grassroots interventions are reshaping lives. Through conversations, the delegation witnessed how ACFODE's gender transformation in social norms changes gender equality, women's leadership, economic independence and peaceful co-existence.



At the center of these efforts are community-driven initiatives, Village Savings and Loan Associations (VSLAs), social enterprises and safe spaces like the Peace Hut, locally known as Nyumba ya Usalama. Here, survivors of violence find protection, dignity, healing, hope and a renewed sense of belonging. These interventions, grounded in trust and participation are systems of support woven into the fabric of everyday community life.

The delegation moved from the ACFODE field office to Kabweza Church of Uganda where representatives of the beneficiaries including model couples spoke candidly about rebuilding relationships through open dialogue and mutual understanding. While the community facilitators and religious leaders reflected on their roles as champions of change, the members of listeners' clubs and school patrons shared how awareness and education are contributing to dismantling social norms that contribute to gender-based violence.

Women described how participation in VSLAs had strengthened their financial independence, confidence and decision-making power in their families and beyond. Couples spoke of homes with less conflict and stronger bonds nurtured through ongoing gender dialogue sessions. Survivors of violence pointed to the Peace Hut not only as a safe space but as a turning point in their journeys toward recovery.



The delegation expressed deep appreciation for ACFODE's community-centered approach, one that actively engages women, men, youth, and local leaders in creating sustainable change, contributing to individual progress, community resilience where social cohesion and shared responsibility take root.

The visit reaffirmed the strength of the partnership between ACFODE, We Effect, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, a partnership grounded in the belief that lasting development begins within communities.

ACFODE Clean-Up in Kamwokya Highlights Urban Waste Crisis and Social Risks



On the morning of March 24, 2026, as the rain poured over Kamwokya II Parish, the impact of poor waste management was hard to ignore. Flooded pathways, clogged drainage channels and scattered waste painted a familiar picture; that speaks not only to environmental neglect, but to deeper challenges affecting health, safety and dignity within the community.

It was within this context that ACFODE, together with community members, local leaders, and partners, organised a community clean-up in Church Zone, Kamwokya II Parish, as part of the International Women's Day commemorations under the theme ***“Scaling up investment to accelerate access to justice for all women and girls in Uganda.”*** The activity brought together residents, Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) s, and partners including We Effect. The initiative highlighted the often-overlooked link between environmental conditions, gender equality and access to justice.

The intervention was shaped by a powerful observation by the ACFODE Executive Director Ms Regina Bafaki who, driving through the area noted the extent of garbage accumulation along roads and drainage channels, particularly in spaces where women operate small-scale businesses. What began as a moment of concern quickly evolved into a coordinated community response that not only improved the physical environment but also engaged residents on underlying social issues such as GBV

During the exercise, participants collected waste from drainage channels and shared spaces. Community members spoke candidly about the realities they face including high costs of garbage collection, limited access to designated dumping sites and coping mechanisms that often involve disposing of waste in drainage systems, especially during rainfall. These challenges, though environmental on the surface, revealed deeper systemic gaps that affect everyday life in poorly planned communities.



*Mr. Kisembo Julius addressing
Kamwokya Community Members after the clean-up exercise*

The activity also created space for dialogue on sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Mr. Kisembo Julius, ACFODE Board Member emphasized that environmental stressors, including poor living conditions and health risks contribute to household tensions and vulnerability, particularly for women and children. He emphasized that safe communities are not built through infrastructure alone, but through environments that support dignity, reduce stress and promote peaceful existence.

Officials from Kampala Capital City Authority pledged to strengthen waste management systems, including regulating garbage collection and promoting waste segregation at the household level, while emphasizing the need for sustained collaboration with communities. Local leaders and residents echoed this call, highlighting the importance of stronger involvement of community structures and improved coordination with city authorities to ensure consistent waste collection and enforcement of proper disposal practices.

The Kamwokya clean-up reflects ACFODE's integrated approach to community development and community-led solutions, linking environmental management to gender equality and GBV prevention.

Pictorial Moment



Breakfast Dialogue on Gender Transformation and Peacebuilding



On the morning of Wednesday, 25th March 2026, ACFODE hosted a Breakfast Knowledge Café at Skyz Hotel, Kampala where a diverse group of stakeholders gathered for a dialogue on gender transformation and peacebuilding.

Organized in partnership with EIRENE eV International Christian Service for Peace and with financial support from the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), the café forms part of ACFODE's ongoing program on promoting peaceful coexistence in refugee and host communities in Kyegegwa District.

It was re-affirmed that gender transformation goes beyond addressing surface level inequalities. It calls for a shift in the underlying social norms, power relations and institutional structures that continue to shape exclusion. This framing guided the discussions, encouraging participants to move beyond theory and reflect on what meaningful change looks like in practice.

Ms. Stella Mystica Sabiiti, former Team Leader at the African Union, delivered a compelling keynote address. She challenged participants to rethink inclusion, not as representation only but as a process of transforming systems that limit women's leadership, participation and influence in peacebuilding and decision-making spaces.



Ms. Stella Sabiiti Mystica Nyonyozi, the Keynote Speaker addressing the participants

Her message was clear: sustainable peace cannot be achieved without addressing the structural barriers that keep women at the margins. The Knowledge Café participants were drawn from the academia, civil society, government and development partners who through rotating group discussions, exchanged perspectives and experiences across key themes. Conversations explored the role of traditional and religious leaders in promoting gender equality and preventing violence, the barriers that limit women's participation in peace processes and the way patriarchal power structures and gender inequalities shape conflict and peacebuilding efforts. As participants moved between tables, ideas deepened, connections formed and a shared understanding about what? began to emerge.

Throughout the discussions, one message remained consistent: women's leadership must not only be recognized, but intentionally protected, strengthened and supported. Participants emphasized the need for practical strategies, ranging from community level engagement to policy influence, to ensure that gender-transformative approaches are meaningfully integrated into peacebuilding frameworks.



ACFODE's Board Chairperson, Ms Hilda Twongyeirwe, addressed participants and reaffirmed the organization's commitment to advancing gender equality, grounding the dialogue in ACFODE's decades-long work with communities. The session concluded with closing remarks from a representative of the Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development, Ms. Catherine Okot, who emphasized the importance of sustained collaboration in advancing gender-just peacebuilding.

Beyond the discussion, the Knowledge Cafe created space to document experiences, share practices and strengthen collaboration among different stakeholders.



Online and Safe : X Space on Protecting Women and Girls



On March 26, 2026, ACFODE hosted an online discussion on X (formerly Twitter) to address online violence against women and girls as part of the ongoing #EndDigitalVAWG campaign. The session brought together participants from across Uganda and beyond to share experiences, insights, and practical responses to the issue.

A total of 215 participants joined the live discussion , with additional engagement recorded afterwards, indicating continued interest and relevance of the topic beyond the live session.

Setting the tone for the conversation, Ms Sandra Kwikiriza, Executive Director at HER internet, painted a picture of the digital landscape many women and girls are navigating today.

From doxxing and cyberstalking to the rise of AI driven deepfakes, she described how online spaces, once seen as tools for connection, activism and expression, are increasingly becoming sites of fear and exclusion. For many, she noted, the cost of speaking out online is silence, as women withdraw, self-censor or disengage altogether to protect themselves.

The conversation then turned toward accountability and support. With Afande Rose Asimwe, Senior Superintendent and Head of the SGBV/TIP Department at the Uganda Police Force, offered insight into existing reporting pathways and survivor support mechanisms. Her remarks highlighted both the progress made and the gaps that remain, reinforcing the need for stronger enforcement of laws and more accessible, survivor-centred systems that people can trust.

Bringing in a social and cultural lens, Rev Nathan Mugalu Balirwana challenged participants to look beyond the surface. He spoke to the role of men as allies and the importance of shifting deeply rooted norms that perpetuate violence. He also pointed to often overlooked contributing factors, such as mental health challenges and substance abuse, calling for more holistic approaches to prevention.

Closing the discussion, Regina Bafaki, Executive Director of ACFODE, brought the conversation back to a broader call to action. She emphasized that online violence is not separate from gender-based violence, it is an extension of it. Addressing it, therefore, requires coordinated efforts across sectors; from policy makers and digital platforms to civil society and communities.

The discussion reinforced the need for collective responsibility in addressing online violence against women and girls, showing that digital platforms can be used for constructive engagement and accountability. As part of a campaign that has reached over 500,000 people, the session highlighted the importance of sustained action, stronger system and continued collaboration among stakeholders to promote safer and more inclusive digital spaces.

From Learning to Earning: Practical Skills Driving Economic Empowerment in Kyegegwa.

In communities where daily life is shaped by both opportunity and uncertainty, even the simplest skills can open the door to economic stability. In Kyegegwa District, ACFODE facilitated a practical skills training for 40 participants (21 females and 19 males) to turn practical knowledge into pathways for income, resilience and livelihood improvement

During the skills training, participants were introduced to bar soap making and liquid soap production; low-cost enterprises that can be started at household level using locally available materials. Resource persons connected the technical skills to real-life opportunities. Participants noted the consistent demand for affordable hygiene products within refugee and host communities, highlighting the potential for small scale production to evolve into sustainable income generating activities. Beyond production, discussions on business management and customer care, value of respect, consistency and product quality, building trust and expansion of enterprises through referrals were also emphasized as key elements for successful enterprises.



Participants also explored practical marketing strategies such as local markets, door-to-door distribution and leveraging VSLA platforms for promotion of their products while recognizing that proper packaging and branding can enhance product value and customer appeal. The practical sessions on measuring and mixing materials were highly engaging, with participants appreciating the hands-on approach that strengthened their understanding of correct procedures and proportions. Safety remained a key focus, with guidance on handling chemicals, using protective gear and ensuring safe storage.



For many, the experience marked a turning point. ***“This skills training has helped me to realize that it is possible to start a small business. I did not know that I could produce soap locally and earn an income from it. I am motivated to begin immediately with my group,”*** shared Esperance Maobi from Kaborogota Zone.

By the end of the training , participants left with renewed confidence and practical ideas they could implement immediately, whether for domestic use or income generation.



Safe Spaces, Stronger Voices: Empowering Girls and Communities to End GBV



ACFODE conducted Safe Space Dialogues on Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) across Kasese, Kyegegwa, Arua, Amudat, Terego, and Tororo districts in March 2026.

Working closely with Local Council Committees (LCCs), representatives from the police, education, and health sectors, creating platforms for out of school adolescent girls and young women to openly share their experiences, challenges and concerns related to GBV and SRHR. The sessions focused on prevention of GBV and Violence Against Children, improving access to essential services,



promoting school retention for girls and strengthening positive parenting practices to reduce risks of violence. The adolescent girls and young women were drawn from existing community structures such as youth groups, religious groups, VSLA groups, Youth Livelihood Programme groups and youth leadership groups.

Through structured discussions and open dialogue, participants explored the realities, forms, causes, effects of GBV, psychosocial services and referral pathways. The discussions brought closer the service providers who engaged directly with participants and responded to their concerns.

The dialogues also elicited reflections from participants. In Kyegegwa, one adolescent girl had this to say: , ***“For the first time, I feel heard. I now know where to go and who to talk to if I face violence.”*** In Arua, a young woman noted, ***“We used to keep quiet because we didn’t know our rights, but now we understand that speaking up can get solutions to our problems.”*** In Tororo, a participant highlighted, ***“These conversations are helping parents and leaders understand what we go through. It gives me hope that things can improve.”***



The dialogues also created space for those working within the system to reflect and respond. In Terego, Ms. Christine Tusambe, a health worker who facilitated one of the sessions emphasized the importance of the initiative, noting, ***“As a health worker, I see many cases that go unreported because young people lack information or fear stigma. These dialogues are critical in bridging that gap by providing accurate SRHR information and clear referral pathways. It is encouraging to see the girls gain confidence to seek support and protect their health and rights.”***

The impact of these ongoing conversations began to extend into action; several girls have been encouraged to return to school and continue pursuing their education. One such moment of hope was seen at Apuwayi Primary School in Tororo District, where ACFODE handed over scholastic materials to the headmistress to support a girl who had resumed her studies in Primary Six.

These outcomes and voices emphasize the value of safe spaces in empowering young women and girls, strengthening community awareness and encouraging collective responsibility in preventing GBV and promoting SRHR.

Women Environmental Defenders Driving Grassroots Climate Action in Mt. Elgon

ACFODE has continued to strengthen the role of Women Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs) as actors in advancing community-led climate action and environmental governance in the Mt. Elgon region. The formed EHRD networks have addressed environmental challenges including deforestation, wetland degradation, poor waste management, and limited uptake of renewable energy.

In Wanale Sub-county, EHRDs facilitated the establishment of 15 community demonstration gardens, planted over 2,300 tree seedlings and constructed soil and water conservation contours which serve as practical learning centers where women and youth gain skills in reforestation and sustainable land management.

EHRDs have advanced clean energy solutions by training and certifying 90 women in the construction of fuel-efficient Lorena stoves. This initiative reduces reliance on unsustainable fuel sources and creates livelihood opportunities for women, demonstrating the intersection between environmental sustainability and economic empowerment.



At the community level, EHRDs are driving behavioral change through awareness and advocacy. Campaigns on waste management and environmental protection including clean-up exercises, community sensitization sessions and collaboration with local police to enforce proper waste disposal practices. In Mbale City, pilot interventions have addressed plastic pollution and water contamination, while in Wanale, regular clean-up activities have encouraged collective responsibility for environmental stewardship.

Engagement with duty bearers has been central to these efforts. Through dialogue with sub-county leadership and district officials, EHRDs have influenced local action on environmental conservation. Notably, this engagement has contributed to increased responsiveness from government actors, including support for climate-smart agriculture initiatives and the integration of EHRDs into programmes promoting organic fertilizer use.

The formation and strengthening of EHRD networks contributed to the sustainability of ACFODE's interventions. With structured coordination mechanisms, emerging constitutions and partnerships with technical officers, these networks are increasingly positioned to engage government in a credible and systematic manner. Their collective voice is amplifying advocacy for stronger enforcement of environmental laws and policies, including those related to biodiversity conservation and industrial accountability.

Despite challenges such as limited funding, EHRDs have demonstrated resilience by leveraging low-cost, community-driven approaches. Their work reflects a growing movement of women, youth and grassroots actors influencing environmental governance, promoting sustainable livelihoods and contributing to a just, green future.

Community Dialogues Spark Action on GBV and Women's Economic Security



Across Kasese District, communities came together to engage in conversations on gender-based violence (GBV). The dialogues, held between 24th and 27th March 2026, were convened by ACFODE as part of the International Women's Day commemorations under the theme ***“Scaling up investment to accelerate access to justice for all women and girls in Uganda.”*** Implemented in partnership with Mt. Rwenzori Coffee Farmers' Cooperative Union and the District Gender Office, the engagements took place in Kilembe, Rukoki (Buhaghura), Kitabu Sub County and Central Division, bringing together 366 participants, including women, men, local leaders and cooperative members.

The dialogues provided a safe and inclusive platform for participants to reflect on the realities of GBV, its root causes and practical pathways for prevention and response.

Participants highlighted that GBV remains prevalent within households, often driven by a combination of harmful cultural norms, economic dependency, alcohol and substance abuse, poor communication and limited awareness of rights.



Participants spoke openly about the different forms violence takes; physical, emotional, sexual, economic and the far-reaching consequences it leaves behind such as family breakdown, trauma, poverty, school dropout and reduced productivity. Many participants acknowledged that while GBV is widespread, it is rarely shared due to stigma related to reporting. For some, this dialogue led to a shift in perspective. ***“For a long time, many of us believed violence in the home was a private matter, but now we understand it affects the whole community,”*** shared a participant from Central Division.

The conversations also focused on solutions with participants guided through existing access to justice mechanisms like Local council structures, police, health facilities and community development officers. Emphasis was placed on timely reporting, confidentiality and the importance of survivor-centered responses that uphold dignity and safety.

A recurring theme throughout the discussions was the importance of women’s economic empowerment as a protective factor against GBV, with participants noting that involvement in savings groups, cooperatives and income-generating activities enhances financial independence and strengthens women’s participation in household decision-making. ***“When women are economically empowered, the entire family benefits, and conflicts reduce,”*** noted a women’s group member from Kilembe Sub County.



Importantly, the dialogues also created space for men to reflect on their role. Many acknowledged the need to move from passive awareness to active participation as allies in promoting gender equality, positive masculinity and shared responsibility within families. Community leaders, religious leaders, and institutions were called upon to strengthen collaboration, enforce existing laws and support survivors. Participants appreciated ACFODE for the opportunity, noting that the conversations increased their confidence to report violence, challenge harmful norms and promote respectful relationships within households.

The dialogues demonstrated strong community participation and a clear willingness among women, men, and local leaders to openly confront gender-based violence when provided with safe and inclusive spaces. They reinforced the importance of sustained community engagement, deliberate inclusion of men in prevention efforts, and linking economic empowerment to GBV prevention.

ACFODE will build on this momentum by working closely with district leadership, community structures, and partners to scale up these efforts, strengthen reporting and response mechanisms and promote inclusive, violence-free communities.

Taking SGBV and Positive Parenting Conversations to the Airwaves

ACFODE is turning up the volume on community awareness by bringing conversations on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV), Violence Against Children (VAC), and positive parenting straight to people's radios across several districts.

These discussions were hosted on Kyaka FM (Kyegegwa), Messiah FM (Kasese), Mega FM (Gulu), East FM (Tororo), and Arua One FM (Arua), creating space for open dialogue on how to prevent violence and build safer, more supportive homes.

The conversations were led by trained Local Council leaders who sit on Local Council courts and regularly handle family and child protection cases. Drawing from real community experiences, they shared practical ways families can prevent violence, resolve conflicts peacefully, and raise children in more positive, nurturing environments.



Many listeners called in to share reflections and appreciation for the timely conversations, saying the discussions helped them rethink parenting and the importance of protecting children. One caller urged communities to speak out against violence and seek help through the right channels instead of letting conflicts escalate.

Local leaders also acknowledged the impact of the initiative. Mr. Abigaba Frank, the Kyegegwa Subcounty representative, appreciated ACFODE's continued engagement, noting visible improvements in girls' school attendance and encouraging parents to stay intentional in guiding children, especially during school holidays.

In Kasese, the District Gender Officer, Asiimwe Queengonda, emphasized that continuous community sensitization remains key in preventing SGBV and VAC, noting that radio remains one of the most effective ways to reach households directly.

By using radio as a trusted and accessible platform, ACFODE continues to amplify community voices, deepen awareness, and support efforts that promote safer homes and stronger protection for women and children.

Thank You
For Reading