



CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

Promoting Positive Socio-Cultural Practices in Lango Sub Region (PRO-GERESOC)

CULTURE: THE BITTER – SWEET PILL

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FOREWORD

Culture is the knowledge and values shared by a particular society. While on the other hand values refer to standards and principles for judging worth ((Halstead 1996). The Uganda national Cultural policy of 2006 defines culture as the sum total of ways in which a society, preserves, identifies, organizes, sustains and expresses itself. Gender on the other hand refers to social constructs relating to behaviors, activities, responsibilities, capabilities, expectations and attributes a particular society considers appropriate for men, women, boys and girls. In recognition of the connectivity between gender and culture, three years ago ACFODE embarked on a project entitled: **“Strengthening Institutions (formal and informal) to Promote Gender Responsive Social Cultures”** implemented in project in Apac and Dokolo districts Lango sub region. Through the project ACFODE interacted with different social actors particularly the cultural and religious with whom we were able to unearth the negative cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequalities. They proved beyond reasonable doubt that with commitment change is possible.

Family being the fabric of society where socialization takes root, working with model couples enabled ACFODE appreciate further the importance of positive parenting, reconciliation, mediation and peer support in promoting positive socio - cultural practices.

ACFODE recognizes the school authorities, teachers, pupils, students and parents who supported the project by mainstreaming the project activities in the school schedules, and providing space, platforms, as well as time for reflection and leaning. The young men and boys are now champions of gender equality in their respective schools and homes. I am confident that we have future leaders, mothers and fathers that will continue advocating for women/girls rights and gender equality.

Particular thanks go to the different rights holders (men, women, boys and girls) that willingly shared their stories of change as a result of their engagement with the project with glamour and enthusiasm. I believe this is a beginning of a great journey in your lives as you strive for gender equality. We would also like to appreciate the different partners within the project districts (Apac and Dokolo), whom we collaborated with for the three years we implemented this project.

We salute the leadership of Dokolo and Apac districts for the support, accorded to ACFODE during the implementation of the project. This was indeed a true reflection of partnership. We are also encouraged by the commitments made to sustain the achievements of the project. Special recognition goes to Ms. Hilda Twongyeire for her contributions towards the compilation of this publication.

We Effect is most gratefully acknowledged for the financial and technical support given to ACFODE during the project implementation. Thank you for trusting and allowing us explore new approaches and strategies for the attainment gender equality.

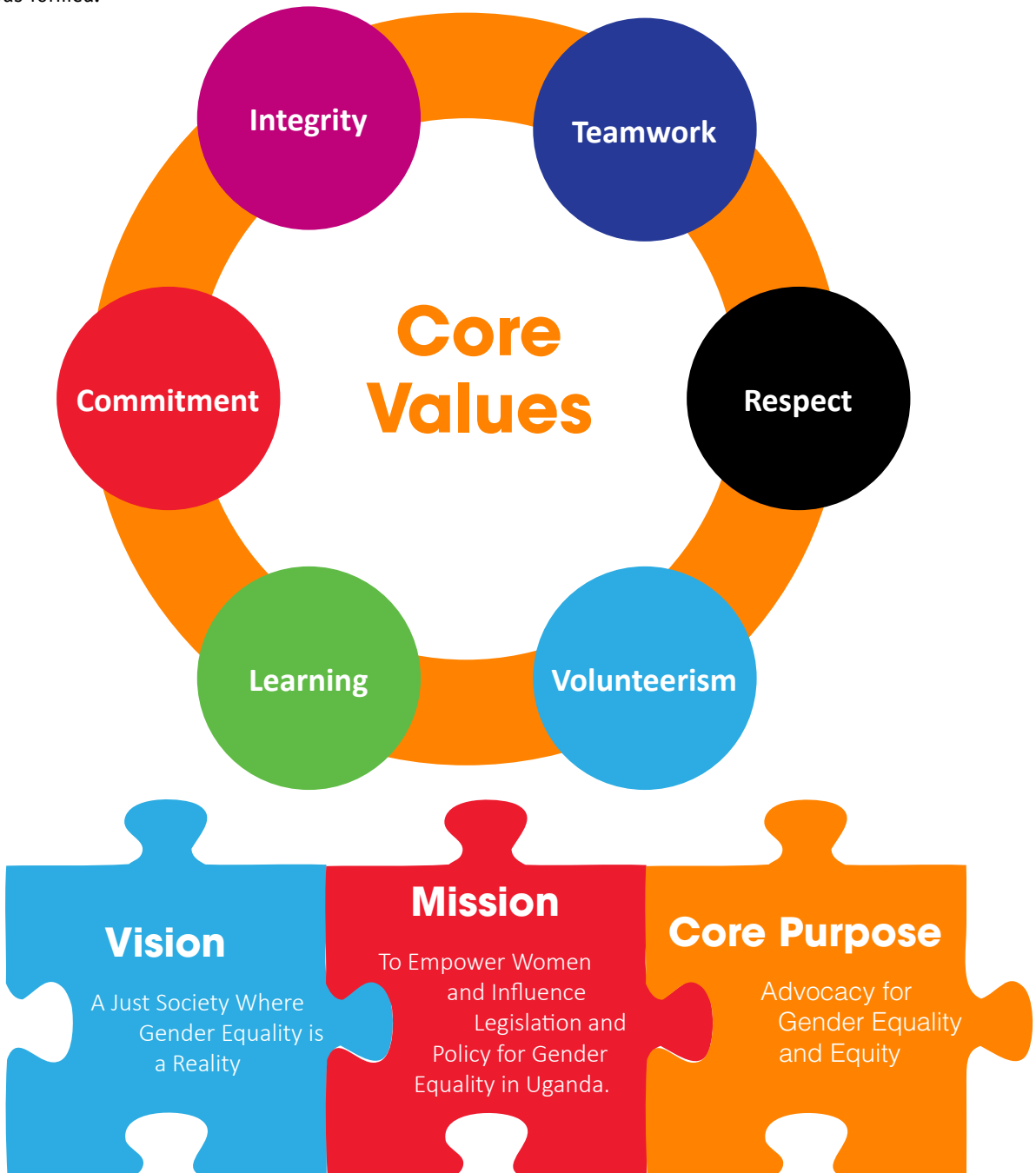
Therefore, it is our hope that you not only enjoy reading this publication – which captures the tremendous achievements we were able to make, but also be enthused to become an advocate of promoting gender responsive cultural practices in your local community.



REGINA BAFAKI
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

ABOUT US

ACFODE is an indigenous, voluntary, non-governmental women's organization founded on November 19th 1985. Its formulation was sparked off by the United Nations third world conference on women in Nairobi in July 1985. With a few women realizing the need for an organized forum that would provide a platform for effective debate and action on issues related to women's rights, empowerment and gender equality, ACFODE was formed.



PROJECT HIGHLIGHTS

264,410 community members and duty bearers (**155,570** male & **108,840** female) reached with direct services and information on positive and negative socio cultural practices, and their role in enhancing GBV over the project period.

2014	2015	2016
- The project was extended from Apac to Dokolo district in two sub-counties of Bata and Kangai. - Women's saving groups and drama groups were formed in Apac as a result of interventions by male role models. - Development and approval of gender sensitive plans and budgets by the district local government council. - C o m m e m o r a t e d International Women's Day in Apac and at national level through which ACFODE created awareness on the Anti-pornography Act to appreciate CSO work of endeavoring to put an end to GBV in Uganda. - 4 primary schools in Apac facilitated to produce talking compounds with messages on promoting positive socio cultural practices. - Achieng Delight a senior four female student from Dokolo district and a primary project beneficiary elected as the Chairperson of the Uganda National Students Association (UNSA).	- Approximately 15,000 people reached through different BCC materials with messages promoting positive socio cultural practices. - 12 Village Savings and Loans Associations supported with grants to boost and sustain their loans and savings schemes and eventually set up business enterprises. - Approximately 56,500 people in Apac, Dokolo and beyond reached with messages on promoting positive social cultural practices including 35,000 men and 21,500 women through radio talk shows. - 30 schools clubs formed in different partner schools to strengthen advocacy for promotion of positive social cultural practices. - An Essay and Spelling B competition organised which saw an improvement in grammar and communication skills amongst participating schools - 210 male role models and 30 model couples oriented and trained to promote positive social-cultural practices. - The trained Male Role Models in turn carried out over 86 community sensitizations on the negative social cultural practices reaching over 18,500 community members (10,300 men and 8,200 women). - 100 leaders of cultural institutions at national level engaged in a cultural symposium aimed at integrating gender in cultural institutions.	- Over 5000 people in Apac, Dokolo and beyond reached with messages on positive social cultural practices through radio talk shows. - Trained model couples in Apac and Dokolo reconciled over 50 violent couples. - 237 members (176 women and 61 men) of Village Savings and Loans Associations in Apac and Dokolo capacitated in saving, loan management, record keeping and conflict resolution and management. - Facilitated students of Kangai SS and Bata SS in Dokolo district formed debating clubs in which boys and girls are given opportunity to express themselves on issues of equality. - Each of the 12 Village Savings and Loans Associations enabled to saved up between 1.5 million to 3 million shillings. - Trained women leaders had their confidence built and contested for both political and other leadership positions within their communities. - A increase in the number of women standing for leadership positions in clan institutions. - An improvement in the way boys and girls are treated in the households and schools. - Sitting arrangements changed in schools with boys and girls sitting together in a mixed order. - The confidence levels among girls in schools improved due to our intervention, with many standing for leadership positions.



*kitenge clothes that
Bedigen women's
group deal in*

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Culture: The Bitter – Sweet Pill

My name is Judith. I come from Kangai Sub-county in Dokolo. I do not want to introduce myself as a widow because that is not important now. What is important is that of late, I have started “feeling like a human being”. Sometimes life can take twists and you wonder whether you will come out of those twists alive. And when you do come out alive, you are again overwhelmed by God’s goodness.

I have been a member of Bedigen Women’s group since it was started. The founder, encouraged us to join the group, an idea she had initiated after encountering numerous problems. One of the problems she had faced as a woman was when she needed some money but she could not borrow it from anywhere: she did not have land or other property to use

as collateral. So she thought of a group that would put some savings together and be able to lend to its members. For me this was timely. It was as if it came to save me.

The women in Bedigen women’s group are now my sisters. They are my mothers. They are my best friends. They are my confidants. You can see how they are all encouraging me to tell you my story because they all know how I have suffered. They all know how far I have come. They are now happy for me. And that is why I can smile today.

Sometimes we have joined groups which have collapsed after only a short time, and we lose even the little we would have saved. Bedigen women’s group has been different. None of us has ever defaulted

and none of us wants to leave. Instead more people would want to join but because we are already many, we have instead been encouraging them to form other groups.

When I was called to join this group I had nothing I called my own except five children to feed and look after. As soon as I got into the group, we shared about how to save money and how to create successful businesses. We talked about taking risks in business. When you have challenges you have to be wise otherwise you can even kill yourself and leave your children as total orphans. I had to be wise and strong.

Then in August 2015, ACFODE trained us more on many business aspects: saving, business, money discipline, confidence, and much more.

After the training I knew that it was important to save with a target in mind. Earlier, I used to save haphazardly and also spend carelessly, buy food and clothes for my children. From the ACFODE training, I started to plan bigger and save every little coin I could.

I was born in a family which had a lot of land but unfortunately I got married into a family with little land. After I had got married, my father-in-law gave us a small piece of land where to cultivate and build our hut. It was our only source of livelihood. Somehow we learnt to work with it the way it was, and we planted cassava, beans, millet, maize potatoes and peas and whatever else we needed.

Unfortunately for me, my husband passed away, leaving me with 5 children. Before his death, I had never imagined being left alone with the children. Maybe that is why I had had five children without realising they were too many in case of any problem. After his death, I was shaken by thoughts of widowhood but because I was married customarily and I had children to look after, I thought my in-laws would not be too harsh to me. I was however scared because I had seen women evicted from their homes even when they had children. But I had also seen families which had been considerate to widows. I hoped my turn was not going to be nasty. The challenge with

Dokolo is that individuals do not own land. Land is owned by clans and families. When a boy marries and is given a portion for cultivation, it is as if he is just holding the land on behalf of the clan or family.

Soon, the negative cultural practices reared the ugly head: my in-laws did not wait for their son to rot in his grave before they started asking me to leave. Although my parents have a lot of land, I did not want to go and ask them for any of it because I knew what to expect if I asked. Maybe they would give it to me and then take it away after my death or after my father's death. Where would that leave my children especially my sons? Maybe they would refuse to give it to me because my father also has sons who would not be happy to see land given to a daughter to feed children of another clan. So I resolved to stay in my hut -the hut my husband had left me in. The dilemma for women is double edged: when you marry and you do not produce sons, the clan does not appreciate you; when a marriage fails and you return to your people with sons, your family rejects you. Women are always at crossroads.

My father in law would stand in the compound and throw words in my direction. They would say abominable things which people would ordinarily fear to use. They asked me what I was doing in their home as if I didn't know that my husband had died.

Much as widow inheritance is rampant in our community, they made it clear that no one was interested in taking me on. I did not leave. They took away all the land they had given us and started digging up to my door-step and they would dare my children and me to step on the gardens surrounding our little hut.

I reported to the clan leader and to LCs but they all could not do anything because one cannot fight against a clan system. If the family is complicated and if the widow has nothing written from her husband giving detailed instructions, everything gets problematic. The challenge also is that the husband cannot write a will for land which he is only custodian of! So however much we moved from one office to the other looking for justice, there was never any solution. Every morning we woke up hoping for an end to the ordeal. My fear was compounded by the stories I had heard about my husband's family. It was believed that there were mysterious deaths sometimes. My sisters and brothers in-law advised me to leave: they did not agree with the way their mother and father were treating me. I did not see an immediate way out, so I pretend to be strong. Culture would not allow my own paternal family to accept me back. I told my children not to fear. I told them that nothing would happen to us. In the meantime, I would dig for people in order



to get food for my children.

One day, after we returned from the clan leaders where we had been discussing the case, my in-laws came straight to my hut. They told me that they were tired of me. They stood outside my hut and abused me. They “undressed” me with their words. They told me that I had no business in their home any more, and that the earlier I left the better for me. This was surprising to say the least: this is a community that practices widow inheritance but this time it was not the case! The inconsistencies of culture or better still, the fact that culture is dynamic and can change if the gatekeepers will it. He threatened me with death, and indeed, I knew I had to leave. I knew that if I stayed, it would be only

a matter of time before their words came to pass.

Around this time I joined Bedigen women’s group I had never been involved in doing business but the problems I had encountered after the death of my husband had taught me that I had to fend for my children. I knew I had to be very quick in finding a solution. After saving with the group a few times, I borrowed some money in May 2015 and ventured into fish selling business. I would get fish from Namasale Landing site on Lake Kioga twice a week and sell it. I still do that and God has helped me a lot because my business has grown. With my first profits, I bought goats – they have multiplied and now I have a source of income.

The teaching by ACFODE also

helped us to learn to set goals and targets. Mine was to buy land, and in August 2016 I sold most of the goats and added to my profits from the fish business and bought land. I can’t believe that I own land from my own sweat - land which no one can lay claim over. I will distribute it among my children so that when I am gone, they are not disturbed, they are not destitute. Also I was very tired of digging for people and renting gardens to cultivate for a living. Now I also rent out my land and get paid by those who do not have their own. Next, I want to build a mabati house. That is my plan and I know with this group, it is just a matter of time and I will not be running around looking for grass to thatch my hut. I am now a title holder, a land lady!

Women too, have Land Rights

Olwech Tony sits on a stool, playing with his daughter who appears sleepy. It is about 7.30 pm and clearly, she is sleepy. For a while she stands the swishing mosquitoes before she finally runs away and makes her way back to the nearest hut where Olwech's wife just disappeared. Olwech is 28 years old. He and his wife have three children; 1 boy and 2 girls. He is a trained builder. He completed his studies at Namasale Technical Institute in Amolator District.

Olwech does not know why but from the time he got to understand issues of property and land, he too believed that women should not own land. "I always marvelled at women in my village clamouring to be given land. I wondered why they could not really understand that land was a men's issue – it

belonged to them. Now I know better. Land is not a men's issue but a livelihood issue." He said.

Olwech's beliefs about women and land changed after his father had passed away. He had started supporting his mother from an early age, and this is when he came to understand that women too needed to have their land rights respected. Fortunately for his mother, she stayed in the home and continued to use the land that his father had left behind. After his father's death, Olwech's brother was made a clan leader but he did not perform to the expectations of the clan; Olwech was soon to replace him on the clan leader's team. "Elders knew they could trust me to deliver. They knew I respected clan values and

traditions like keeping women away from clan land since they do not belong to the clan." However, all this slowly began to change after realising that my mother would be victim of such beliefs.

When Olwech got on the committee, he helped a lot. He would intervene in many cases in the village. "I mediated numerous land wrangles and other cases. That is how our LC3 Chairman recommended me to be on the ACFODE committee as a male role model. I was a bit confused about my role. The training by ACFODE did not help matters either: they were talking about getting women into leadership even on clan committees, giving women land ownership rights, and this would be strange. The fact is that clan leaders

are the gatekeepers of our cultural institutions and there are things that do not change easily with such institutions. From my interactions with ACFODE and from the cases that we deal with, I began to realise and appreciate my role to help people change their attitude. I began to believe in this change myself."

Olwech says that he is very grateful to God who has enabled him to create positive change with many families. "As a role model I have even had to intervene in my own brother's marriage – he was a true chauvinist as tradition teaches men, always grabbing food from the family granary and selling it off, and beating up his wife if she complained. I have also helped another family that was going through the same struggles and they have settled. It wasn't a one-off affair; I had to talk to them over time.

Being a role model has endeared him to many people. People learnt to trust him. Even when he is not aware of their issues they come to him for counsel. He has helped people deal with different issues ranging from wife battering to youth who are delinquent. One such case involved a neighbour's son who just kept missing school. "When I spoke to the boy, he said that it was his father's fault because he had refused to buy him school uniform. When I spoke to the father, he



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showed me the boy's uniform and he said that he was just rejecting school. I called the boy again and spoke to him. I told him that it was his future at stake and not his father's." Sometimes children want to hear another voice other than their parents'. The boy eventually went back to school but I follow up to ensure that he keeps going". After that case, Olwech took it upon himself to ensure parents in his community send their children to school. He keeps speaking to them and giving them examples of what education does for families. Being a role model has no end; the responsibility

keeps growing.

Olwech confesses that he has had to mediate very difficult cases, especially those to do with land, showing how much importance is attached to this resource. People defend it with their whole lives. It is a battle and the "weaker" ones; in this case the women normally lose the battle. There was one particular difficult case, where even clan leaders failed to resolve the matter and I was called in. People know that I deliver with fairness, even at my young age. My major source of confidence however was the knowledge I acquired from ACFODE training. When those people called me, I went to a fellow role model on the same programme and asked him to support me to go and speak to these people whom everybody perceived to be impossible. We went together and managed to help them settle their case," Olwech said, smiling. Team work did it for us. We network a lot as role models so that we give one another support.

He would like to get more support from ACFODE to be able to cover a larger area. He thinks that if he got a bicycle he would reach more people. An ACFODE uniform or badge would earn him quicker acceptance from people. He is committed to advancing what ACFODE started in order to help his people build livelihoods that they would all be proud of, livelihoods that are inclusive.



Nurturing Positive Family Relationships: the Power of Financial Freedom

25-year old Daniel leans against the blue plastic chair and stretches his legs to his full 6.5ft height. He is delighted to share his story. Daniel is the 6th child in a family of twelve. He was born and raised in Bata, in Dokolo District. He got married in a Catholic Church in 2012 to a stunning black beauty. Daniel was the happiest man as he took his wife down the aisle. Looking across to where she is seated he says, "I knew I had married the most beautiful girl in the village. My family supported our wedding and that's how I managed to pull it off." She sits on the grass under a mango tree waiting upon him as he tells his story. They have 2 children. Daniel says that before he got married he wanted to have 12 children like his parents but he has long changed his mind.

A year into marriage, the bliss of their union seemed to be dying out. The cause was the poverty they lived with. It was gnawing away at their love. Out of fear and anxiety about their relationship, Daniel worked at all sorts of jobs that he came across. Unfortunately, he always got too little to sustain him and his wife. Before long his wife got pregnant. Daniel started to get worried because he did not see anything coming his way. "I am not educated and so I could not think of looking for a formal job. I do not have any practical skills like driving or mechanics or any other and so I just stayed home, and did all sorts of odd jobs. Whenever I spoke to my

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I KNEW I HAD TO CATCH UP. AS I SAID, I HAD NO IDEA ABOUT WHAT BUSINESS I COULD START TO RAISE MONEY NOT ONLY FOR REINVESTMENT AND GROUP SAVINGS BUT ALSO FOR FAMILY UPKEEP.

friends about my plight, they would just tell me that I needed to work hard. But I was already working hard. I did not know how much harder they wanted me to work," he says.

One day, Daniel during a conversation with a village-mate called Gloria Aweli, she told him that she was a member of Awong United Women's Group. Because she knew how he was struggling, she invited him to join them if he so wished. As it turned out, Gloria was the founder and Chairperson of the group which she had founded in 2010. The members were helping each other to save money and to borrow. "She also told me that they had both men and women in the group and members had the opportunity to share ideas and encourage one another."

Daniel says.

He joined the group in 2013. He found out that members were saving and then sharing dividends at the end of the year. Almost all of them had already started small businesses. When he got his small share, the Chairperson was again at his side encouraging him to also start a small business instead of consuming all the money at home. "This was an eye-opener for me because I had never done any business. I had never even thought that I could run any business. My head was blank as far as business was concerned."

Unlike other savings groups he had seen in the village, Awong United Women's Group had started determining a compulsory figure for all members to save. The purpose was to build a disciplined saving culture among the members while increasing the group's capital base. They set tough rules and governance structures. "I knew I had to catch up. As I said, I had no idea about what business I could start to raise money not only for reinvestment and group savings but also for family upkeep. I was desperate to restore the beautiful relationship I had with my dear wife – this was the test of every man worthy of the name. I was aware that love alone could not suffice. I needed to do more to ensure that the strain that was creeping in would not escalate into domestic violence. You do not put love on the plate and

say eat – you do not serve love for a meal," he says with an infectious smile.

Daniel started off by borrowing fifty thousand shillings from the group. He decided to start trading in produce. He bought millet, beans and groundnuts from the community and took them for sale in Otuboi market which runs twice a week and to Dokolo town. By the end of 2014 his business had grown. He does not know how much profit he made per month but he found he had a total of 400,000 Uganda Shillings after paying off the loan. He decided to expand his business to Lira town.

In Lira, Daniel realised he had to form new partnerships in order to get businessmen to buy his produce. He had to learn to negotiate and to speak to people even those he did not know. Fortunately for him in 2015 ACFODE conducted training for his group and he learnt a lot of new business skills. He improved in the way he managed his business and realised he even needed more capital. Businessmen were asking for more than he could supply. One day, he was in Lira Town and one of the businessmen who had recently become his friend through doing business together, called him and offered to lend him 2,000,000 Uganda shillings – interest-free, to invest in his business. "I had now started getting friends who had some

money. This was a totally new category of friends but I had also learnt how to speak like a businessman so I fitted in. When you have no money you can only have friends who are poor like you because those are the ones you interact with. When you get money, the type of friends also changes,” he says.

Daniel rented a small store at the trading centre in his village where farmers and businessmen started bringing produce for sale. He had a physical trading business. His dreams are big. He shares that, “I also think about taking my children to University so that they attain a better education than I did. I no longer want 12 children because if I got them, there is no way I would manage to look after them and then pay their fees. Now I want four children. I believe my wife will agree with me. This group does not only teach us things to do with money but also other things in other areas of life, such as family planning.”

Daniel is still hampered by transport challenges which are common in the district as whole; there are no taxis which go into the villages. His bicycle transport or the public commuter taxis can only carry little. “My next target is to buy a motorcycle to ease transport challenges and who knows; maybe someday I will even buy a vehicle. It is a distant dream. After my business has grown

and I have paid off my friend in Lira, I will buy land. For now, we live on inherited land from my father and it is very small. It cannot sustain my family and one cannot be free on a small piece of land. I have four brothers and we are all looking at Baba’s land. None of us has bought land yet.” he says.

Daniel says that when he joined Among Women’s group he was only looking at making money. Being part of the group has however impacted on his whole life in many ways. “I have learnt that women are very productive and encouraging. They are practical and helpful. Whereas my friends just used to tell me to work hard, these women have guided me on what to do. They are not selfish. They are so selfless that they even surprise me sometimes. They invite each other to invest into the same businesses as they are in. For instance, many of them sell porridge in the same market. When one of them started selling porridge and realised that there was high demand, she invited the others. Somebody else could have just kept quiet and instead worked to exhaust the demand. Women share ideas and are genuinely interested in each other’s well-being.” This is an aspect of their strength that men seem to ignore or not to be aware of.

He has also learnt that women are good leaders too; dependable and not corrupt. He says, “Society misses out by



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keeping women out of leadership positions. You can’t know their potential if you have not tried them. The success of Among women’s group is testimony to women’s leadership. This group is steered by women. Women are unstoppable. They just keep going. All the women in our group are traders. Some deal in produce like me. Others sell porridge and other foodstuffs. Others are even laying bricks. These women are holding their families together and in so doing this community is depending on them in many ways,” Daniel concludes. He is now working to reach more business partners who will help him grow his business further. He appreciates his group members because they have become close friends and confidants and they are part of his business community because they bring him produce and they recommend to him business opportunities.

Members of Berlela women's group show off their goats.

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EDUCATION TRULY EMPOWERS

Acan Jennifer is one of the members of Barlela Women's Savings and Loans Association located in Bata Sub-county in Dokolo District. The group was started as an adult learning literacy group in 2011 at Barlela primary school by Moses Otema after he noticed that many women were being held back by illiteracy. Jennifer joined the group in 2011, space she describes as school because in it, she has learnt a lot of things. "It brings the nostalgia of our school days as little girls; hurdling

in front of the teacher trying to understand everything he would be teaching us. It is the same way we all hurdle in front of Moses, and we have all learnt a lot from him and from each other," Acan says.

Before Acan was identified by Moses and asked to join the group, she was one of the most notorious women in the village. She says "This group has changed my life. Everybody in this village knew me as the woman who fights with her husband daily. My husband

drinks a lot and quarrels. I would not hesitate to pick quarrels with him every time he started it. Sometimes I would provoke him; not bothered whether he beat me or not. We would fight until neighbours came and separated us. I had long given up on a peaceful life with my husband."

"When Moses invited me to join the group, I was very reluctant: I felt I would not be easily accepted by the other members since they all knew what was happening in our

home. I believed they would all judge me. What's more, the other women seemed happily married, so how would I fit in their lives?" Acan was able to join the group because Moses insisted. He encouraged her and never gave up on her.

"I am so happy that he managed to convince me. I used to stay home alone most of the time waiting for nothing other than our fights. For many years I had lived an isolated life and I had drifted into hopelessness. We have no land so I would not be out in the gardens. I am not educated so I had no job outside home. I stopped in primary school after my parents failed to pay school fees although they paid for my brothers. I would not even go out to church or the market or even the trading centre because I never felt deserving of being part of other people."

Acan had lived most part of her life in shame because of the endless fights and quarrels with her husband and a life controlled by alcohol. She felt all her dignity was gone and she believed nobody respected her. However, joining the group created a big difference in her life. "Being part of this group has made me feel like a human being again. Now I have learnt a lot of skills. For instance, when my husband comes home drunk and quarrels, I keep quiet and even walk away from him. When I need something from him I negotiate with him.

Earlier on, I would not move away even when I clearly saw that he wanted an excuse to beat me up. I have learnt to ignore him. Surprisingly he no longer fights as much as he used to. I think he also feels ashamed to fight when he finds me peaceful. But I also counsel him sometimes. Now I can welcome people in my home without being scared. There are some issues which other people might take for granted or never think about at all. For many years for example, I never received visitors in my home; probably because I never invited people, but they also never came. I did not think about it until I started receiving guests home recently.

Acan soon started seeing the benefits of associating with the members of Balerla Women's Group, most striking being the ideas that they share and the skills they learn. The most valuable skills for her have been in the area of handling money – how to save and spend. She is no longer reckless with the money she borrows; she borrows with a purpose. She has benefitted a lot from ideas about investment as she recounts an incident. She says, "One time I borrowed some money to take my child for medication. Even though I had one chicken as my sole money-generating property and I did not want to sell it. On advice from one of the members, I got a loan and bought a goat. I am now a proud owner of five goats."

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The benefits for Acan go beyond the loans; the group interactions have healed the pain of a dysfunctional relationship. She happily narrates, "These days my husband and I discuss investing together, something that was never heard of in our family. We have bought a small bull and a bicycle. We are making bricks to build a mabati house. I also trade in millet which I sell as far as Soroti and I am no longer the idle woman who Moses

identified to join his literacy classes. Thanks to ACFODE's grant to the group that enabled me start the business with a loan of Ug Shs. 100,000/=. Now I am a busy woman. My confidence has increased and I no longer feel the shame I used to. By the way I even speak some English as you can hear,"

Before she joined Barlela Women's Group, she could not speak in public. She also found it hard to make any contribution in class but the other members kept encouraging her. She is grateful to ACFODE for empowering her and other women in the group who she calls her sisters. Their quality of life has improved, generally. "I believe my 3 children will now lead a better life. I am not planning to have more. Maybe I might do so later, but not now, because I have already started family planning," Acan says proudly.

Before Moses started Barlela village group, he was a catechist and he encountered the glaring disadvantages particularly faced by women as a result of lack of education. In church meetings, when the women would be asked to sign their attendance they would excuse themselves and ensure that the registration book did not reach them. Sometimes they would ask their neighbours to sign for them. This hurt him a lot and immediately he retired, he decided to intervene and start a literacy class. Moses invited

both men and women to join him for literacy classes but the men shied away. Only a few women took the opportunity seriously and turned up. As these women gained literacy skills, they started telling other women about the group and inviting them, and as a result, the group has grown in numbers.

Moses's two wives are part of Barlela Women's Group – true to the saying: charity begins at home. In 2014, the group added a financial aspect and transited into a Village Savings and Loans Association. Their lessons have not focused on literacy and financial skills only, but on other issues such as hygiene, control of domestic violence, social values, nurturing relationships, and a lot more. Moses has witnessed tremendous change in the lives of the women of this group. They have taken up leadership in church and in the local council. Even those who are not in leadership are no longer as timid as they used to be. They go to meetings and contribute to debates and speak better than men. This, he attributes to ACFODE, which has trained members of the group in leadership skills and also given them a grant which members have borrowed to start trading. Moses believes that money comes with power.

Other members of Barlela women's group agree with Moses, "Now I no longer miss

meetings because of fear of speaking or writing," says 59-year-old Filda Ngole. "This group has transformed me into another woman. These days I stand in church and make announcements. That's something I never thought I could do. When you can write and you can make some money and get the things you want, you realise that you are no longer scared of taking your space in public life."

Filda further shared how, when she was treasurer of the group, she would just keep the money in a pot in the house and she and her husband would use it with abandon. Because they were illiterate, they would not keep records of what they were using. It would then accumulate and soon they would find themselves unable to pay back to the group. "I lost property to the group. They would sell it to recover the money and interestingly they would ask me to be treasurer again. They would all say that I am a good woman and needed to be helped to stop the habit. They talked to me and made me realise that instead of picking money all the time, I should take it once and start a small business to give me profits. Now I make mandazi. I no longer get into trouble. Because of the skills I have gained from this group, I am now a member of the clan committee and I am their treasurer," Filda concludes.



When Culture makes one Destitute

Odur Levi, a teacher by profession, hails from Dokolo District. He teaches Christian Religious Education at secondary school level. "I was asked to be part of ACFODE activities in 2014. We were taken for training where we majorly discussed cultural practices that affect women. Being single and not yet about to get married, he says that to be a role model has humbled him because sometimes he gets to support married couples who are even older than he is.

Asked to share why he accepted to be part of ACFODE, he says, "I have always supported women and so I thought it was an opportunity to be part of their work so that I could even play a more active role. However, when we got into training, I realised that it was not just about women's work but work to uplift our communities." Throughout the discussions in the training, he harboured serious reservations. He did not feel convinced by what was being discussed even though he has always believed in women and the potential they have when given opportunity. One thing however was that he had never considered it appropriate to give women land or have them in leadership positions. All this was fuelled by the cultural beliefs and expectations that after all women would be married into other clans. He also felt that women would not deserve to be in leadership



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because they are very strict and do not easily change when their minds are made up.

Odur says that the training and active involvement with ACFODE has caused him a total mind-set shift. He remembers a case where 2 daughters to his uncle separated from their husbands in a short span of time and they both returned home. Their brothers refused to give them land where they would put up their homes and start afresh, and yet, they could not stay with them. Their parents were already dead but even if they were not dead, grown up women do not share a hut with their parents. The girls called a family meeting and begged for help but nobody listened. "I think everybody feared to set a precedent of giving girls land. The girls went on to the clan leaders and reported the matter but the clan too

did not help. We sat in the meeting but did not resolve the case because the family ultimately has the last word," Odur says. "At the end of the meeting one of the girls stood up and wept. She said that it was so dehumanising to be a destitute in her own home and despite the fact that her parents' land was available. She said to us; "if you let me please, I will build on my father's grave. At least I know that it is not being used by anybody else for now."

This did not only shock Odur but it also made him appreciate fully the gravity of the cultural beliefs surrounding women's inheritance to land, confirming to him how this beliefs fan violence against women and girls. "Who else could think of a grave as the only space available for them to put up a home? This was a clear sign that these girls are destitute" Odur remarks sadly. He found himself reflecting on the plight of women and this motivated him to make a personal commitment to do something about it. He got courage and told the clan leaders that one way to respect the dead is by providing for their children. He told them that if they did not want to give the girls land, he would personally take them to the Justice Centre to seek justice.

Mention of the Justice Centre frightened the clan leaders. "Clan leaders are interesting.

They do not want outsiders intruding into their issues. May be it's because they are aware of the fault lines/gaps within our traditional systems. Anyhow, they finally gave the girls land but on condition that, the land did not belong to them permanently, and as such there was no agreement given to them. They were told that if they got married again, the land would be taken would revert back to the family (read men) His protests against this undocumented transaction went unheeded, but with a clear statement that the cultural beliefs were still stronger than the so called civilisation.

Odur explains that elders are not willing to change and so a lot of effort is needed to influence them because they still think and believe that keeping women away from certain spaces is ensuring the clan's posterity. Odur continues, "I have not been able to influence these communities yet. But I am looking at influencing young people. Fortunately, 6 students from our school were trained by ACFODE as agents of change. I am now working with them to influence their communities. Once our voice becomes bigger and louder, surely it will not be ignored."

Odur is Assistant Head of Laity at St Janan Luwum Church of Uganda and he has taken the advocacy into that

space also. He believes that Church is still deep rooted in traditions most of which either relegate or are used to relegate women to a secondary position. Church uses the bible whether correctly or conveniently to support their views towards men and women in society." Odur's concluding remarks affirm his fears about the way the church views women. The school he teaches in is Church founded, and it had just got the 1st female Head Teacher, Ms Odong Lilly, since it started in 1983. "It is not because there were no qualified women. It's because it is almost like a norm in church establishments, that it is the men who are leaders." he substantiated. He described Mrs Odong as a very hardworking woman who knew what she wanted as head of a school. She has confidence and is not cowed by whatever rumours spread about her. I think she is going to inspire many girls to aspire for leadership," he concluded. Mr Odur ensures that whenever he gets an opportunity, he speaks about the need for change in order to make their community move forward.

ACFODE's reawakening

Oludi Jasper (34) and Apili Harriet (32) look like brother and sister. They are both small bodied and quite soft spoken. They sit close to each other unlike most couples in such rural settings. They have 4 children together. Asked how they came to be part of ACFODE, Harriet explains that she and her husband were invited by the parish chief. "He knew what was going on between us. Everybody in the village knew about us," she says.

"And for all the wrong reasons," Oludi interjects. They smile at the same time and Oludi continues. "However, we thank God that these days the story has changed. It is one those things that are not easy to explain; how you suddenly feel like enemies but at the same time continue to live together!"

From their smiles, one cannot tell what could have been amiss with this lovely family. "We started off our family very happy but along the way something went wrong. I realised that my wife was becoming lazy. She was no longer active in the gardens. This would make me very angry. I wondered where the hardworking woman I married had disappeared."

"You can be with a person and you do not know that you are hurting her or him. When she stopped working with me in the gardens as she used to,

I just wondered because she was not telling me what the problem was. We started to quarrel often. I would go to the gardens and return to find her home very comfortable doing her own things. I would just go and plant potatoes without discussing with her. Or plant beans without telling her; we were not talking, you see."

I got to learn later why she had stopped working with me in the garden. . On many occasions when we would have needs in the house or when I would need personal money as a man I would take beans or millet or any other foodstuff from the house and go and sell. This would be a unilateral decision. I never involved her in making such decisions, and was blind to the fact that I was hurting her"

Apili confirms that was the main reason why she stopped going to the garden, though



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she did not open up to him.

Oludi agrees. "Silence is very bad. And that is even what we realised when we went for training with ACFODE. From what most of the couples were sharing, lack of communication is one of the problems that can bring a home to shambles, whether it is between husband and wife or children and parents. Culture was at play again. Oduli did not sell produce because he disrespected his wife; in his culture, a man does not discuss with the wife when he wants

to sell crops or anything in the home because everything in a home belongs to the man. This is inherited from the fathers, and if it is not stopped will result into a vicious cycle.

"Unlike other men I was hard working and I took care of my wife's basic needs." Before long, I heard that she was also selling the crops – trying to get even, I guess" This was totally against our culture! In fact, she was actually stealing! I wasn't stealing because I would take the things in her presence.

The rumours kept doing the rounds. I also lay my own traps and catch her. She also started drinking whenever she sold something.

We seemed to be headed in different directions and inevitably from around 2010, we started to fight almost daily," Oludi says shaking his head.

ACFODE changed the whole trajectory for this family. It reawakened their humane feelings! They shared that even when what they were taught was not entirely new; it brought new meaning into their lives. It reminded them the importance of planning together in a home is very helpful, taking our children to good schools is important, and that one needs to pay school fees, hitting another person is bad because they too feel as much pain as you would feel when you are hit, that after

you have hit your wife and you are asking her to turn and face you in bed, it is painful for her. ACFODE's intervention was timely: we were both at a point where we needed a solution."

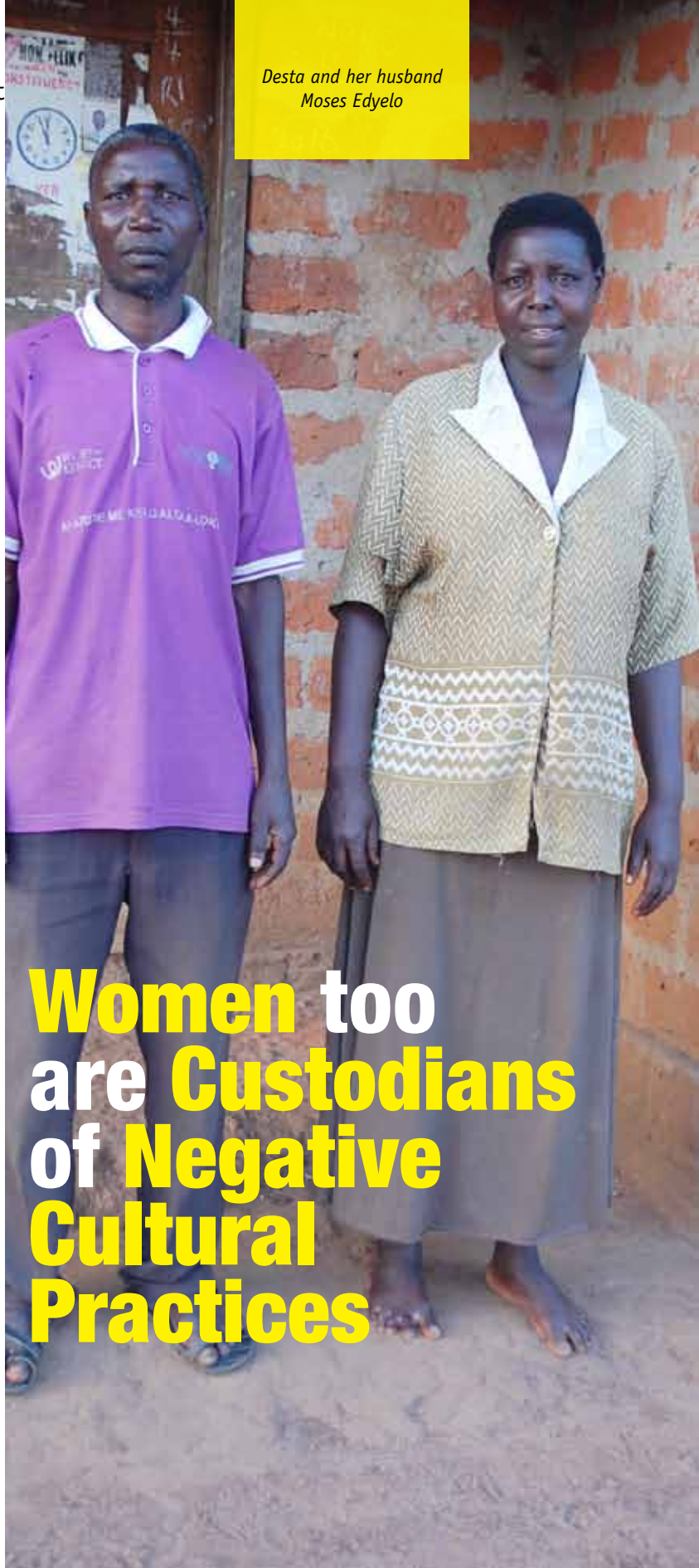
The couple pointed out that their reckless actions had led to starvation and hunger in their home and soon they became the village laughing stock. Everyone had had enough of them. Apili clears her voice and says, "Fortunately, everything he is telling you belongs to the past. From the ACFODE training we pledged to be different. It has been a struggle but we have achieved a lot. At that time we had nothing at all. Now we have four cows. When you come to the village, people will point you to our home and say; that homestead with four cows. It is no longer, that homestead of the fighting couple. . We are now paying fees for children and they are in school comfortably not being chased for fees every day."

Oludi interjects, "Our relationship has improved greatly. We care for each other in as far as possible. We even share chores in the home, and according to some people, this is not proper for a man-they say I am now the wife. Interestingly however, we have inspired some friends of ours to also change. When they see what we were and what we are now and what we have, they appreciate the transformation. They even come to us to ask for

advice and we also go out and speak to those we know need help.

Apili and Oludi believe that everybody can change if they choose to. They give an example of their friend who had married seven wives, until Oludi went and talked to him. I shared our experience with him and he listened. He is now a changed man and is settled with a wife who has had a child with him already. My wife too has helped to rebuild some broken homes."

"That's true," Apili confirms. "Women too can harass their husbands. For example a friend of mine would never allow the husband to sell animals even when they would have needs. She would only accept on condition that the husband had to give her the money which she would take to her parents' home even when the money would not be enough for their own home needs. My talking and counselling helped her and I am happy that now they have a decent Home and bought a bicycle. They have even moved faster than us because for us we have not yet built. But we have the plan to build" she says looking at her husband.



**Women too
are Custodians
of Negative
Cultural
Practices**



THE TRAINING HAD REKINDLED ALL THE BEAUTIES THAT EACH ONE OF US HAD INSIDE. BY THE END OF THE TRAINING, IT FELT LIKE WE HAD RENEWED OUR MARRIAGE COMMITMENTS TO EACH OTHER

Marrying at 17 did not stop Ediyero from exploring some of the cultural privileges of being a man in his community. His was a case of culture being exerted by a woman, his mother who coerced him to marry at that tender age. Of course women are also socialised amidst stereotypes of sorts. Odiyero's mother reasoned that he had no father and so needed to marry and become head of the family.

Ediyero decided to do what he thought would make him more of a man, the head of the family that his mother wanted him to be so he took to drinking alcohol, abandoning the wife at home. On many occasions, both his wife Desta and the child would not see him until the following day. Sometimes,

they would not see him for days.

When they married, his wife was equally young. She too was 17. They were both children, planning to beget other children. This took a toll on their relationship; both of them did not seem to know how to manage this early marriage.

Ediyero seemed to be fighting the "forced marriage" brought upon him by his mother. Not that there were no young men of his age that had wives and were able to take care of them. What made Ediyero's situation particularly bad was because unlike his age mates, he did not make the choice to marry at that age and he was not prepared for the responsibility.

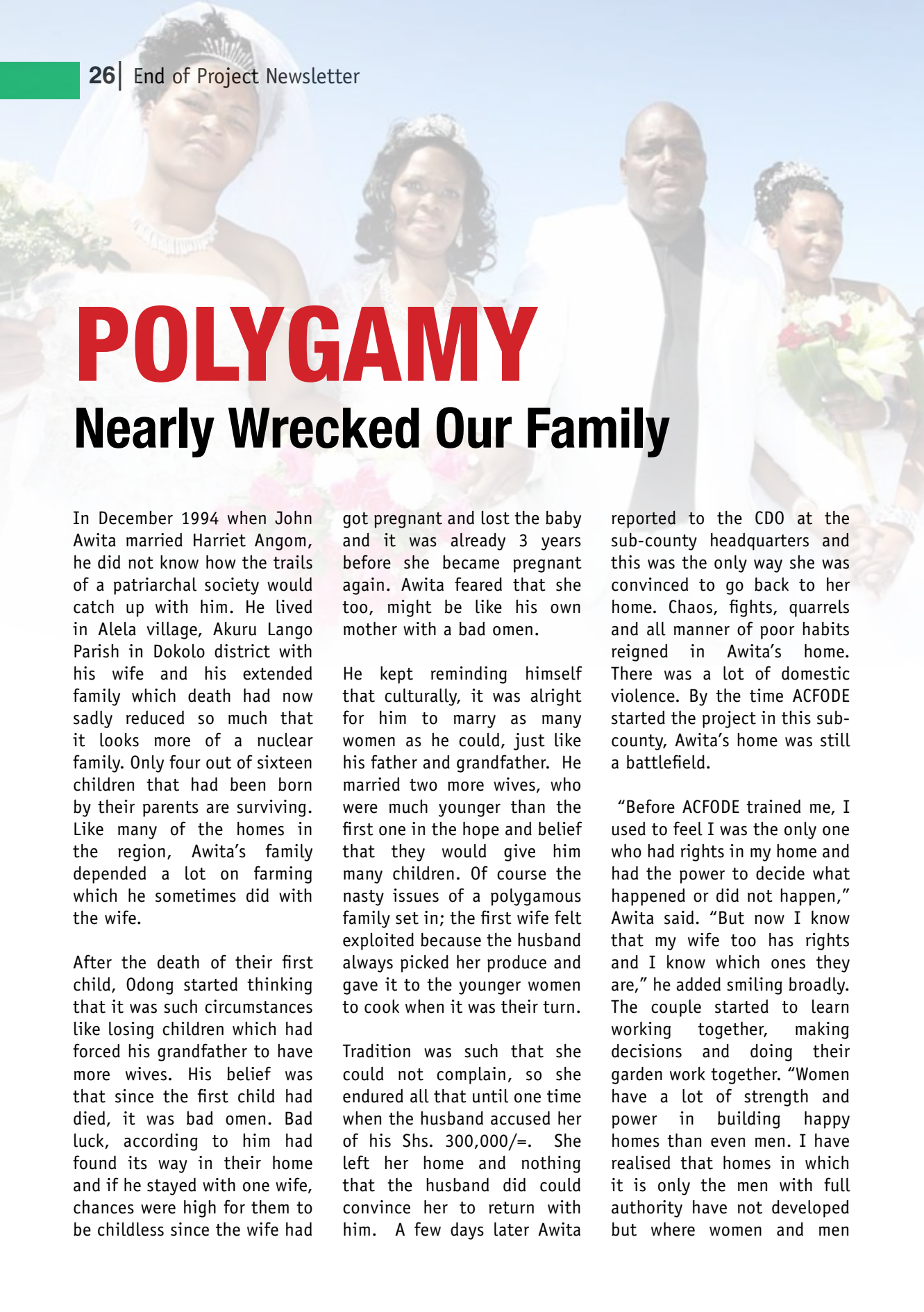
There were suspicions of promiscuity and this strained the relationship further. Odiyero also did not think it was necessary to help his wife with the work in the gardens, especially during the harvesting time: she always needed his help; to harvest, to carry the harvest from the gardens, to put it out to dry and to carry it from the backyard back to the house or the granary whenever it threatened to rain or in the evenings. Perhaps it was the chauvinism or ignorance or the traditional mind-set that pushed him. Ediyero suggested to his wife that he wanted to bring in other hands to help her with the heavy workload. This

created more anxiety between them, and inevitably, the violence started. They had fights almost daily until one day Desta felt that she had had enough and she packed her bags and went back to her parents' home. Odiyero then started marrying wife after wife, until he settled with one of them. When they trained as a role model couple with ACFODE, theirs was more than just training. "The training had rekindled all the beauties that each one of us had inside. By the end of the training, it felt like we had renewed our marriage commitments to each other," Ediyero said.

'And when we returned home, it felt like our love had just begun. My husband started treating me so well," Hope confirmed.

From that time the couple continued to interact with ACFODE. The understanding that respect does not call for the other person to be subdued has helped Ediyero a lot. This, they have been able to apply not only in their lives but have transferred to other couples in their community to help them strengthen their relationships too.

"Many couples we have talked to in this community say we have been a big blessing to them and believe me, it was ACFODE that made this possible," Ediyero said, holding his hands together in gratitude.



POLYGAMY

Nearly Wrecked Our Family

In December 1994 when John Awita married Harriet Angom, he did not know how the trails of a patriarchal society would catch up with him. He lived in Alela village, Akuru Lango Parish in Dokolo district with his wife and his extended family which death had now sadly reduced so much that it looks more of a nuclear family. Only four out of sixteen children that had been born by their parents are surviving. Like many of the homes in the region, Awita's family depended a lot on farming which he sometimes did with the wife.

After the death of their first child, Odong started thinking that it was such circumstances like losing children which had forced his grandfather to have more wives. His belief was that since the first child had died, it was bad omen. Bad luck, according to him had found its way in their home and if he stayed with one wife, chances were high for them to be childless since the wife had

got pregnant and lost the baby and it was already 3 years before she became pregnant again. Awita feared that she too, might be like his own mother with a bad omen.

He kept reminding himself that culturally, it was alright for him to marry as many women as he could, just like his father and grandfather. He married two more wives, who were much younger than the first one in the hope and belief that they would give him many children. Of course the nasty issues of a polygamous family set in; the first wife felt exploited because the husband always picked her produce and gave it to the younger women to cook when it was their turn.

Tradition was such that she could not complain, so she endured all that until one time when the husband accused her of his Shs. 300,000/=. She left her home and nothing that the husband did could convince her to return with him. A few days later Awita

reported to the CDO at the sub-county headquarters and this was the only way she was convinced to go back to her home. Chaos, fights, quarrels and all manner of poor habits reigned in Awita's home. There was a lot of domestic violence. By the time ACFODE started the project in this sub-county, Awita's home was still a battlefield.

"Before ACFODE trained me, I used to feel I was the only one who had rights in my home and had the power to decide what happened or did not happen," Awita said. "But now I know that my wife too has rights and I know which ones they are," he added smiling broadly. The couple started to learn working together, making decisions and doing their garden work together. "Women have a lot of strength and power in building happy homes than even men. I have realised that homes in which it is only the men with full authority have not developed but where women and men

share the authority and make decisions together, they have developed," Awita explains.

The couple explained that when they went for the training, they were asked to get back home and develop a work plan. In their work plan, their activities were mainly to counsel other couples experiencing violence. They had to develop a strategy of how make their plan work. For example, they always ask for some minutes during the segment for announcements in church and they continuously sensitise people on the issues using that platform.

The couple also devoted their home as a temporary shelter for people running away from gender based violence. "We would like to keep record of our work by writing the names of the people we have counselled, helped and sheltered. This will help us measure the successes. So if ACFODE could buy us books to do this, it would be great help," Awita's wife requested.

"We are now living in harmony. As we lay here on this mat waiting for you, the men passing by were calling my husband, asking him to go join them for a drink. But he did not move, he stayed here chatting with me and it felt so good," she added. And that is how it has been since we decided to be in charge of each other's happiness.

ACFODE Continues to Cause Gender Transformation

"As the lady was talking during the ACFODE training, I kept feeling guilty. It was as though she knew about me and my bad manners. That was the beginning of my journey to change" Patrick said, looking at his wife who was seated just next to him.

Patrick had married his wife Sarah when he was only 22 years old. Sarah was 20 years old then. And although Patrick shared that he loved his wife, he had a weakness for women. He started engaging in extra marital affairs soon into their marriage. He then started encroaching on the family food reserves in order to please the concubine. And as usual, the wife was not expected to ask where the food was going. Domestic violence was inevitable; fights became frequent in their home. The situation worsened when Sarah confirmed that Patrick was seeing someone else and that is why he was depleting the family reserves.

In 2014 the LC1 chairman

identified the couple and introduced them to the Community Development Officer (CDO) who then recommended them for the ACFODE training. Patrick sat in the training room and could not help feeling guilty as the trainer elaborated on a number of issues that were pertinent to them; issues like the need for all members in a household to share house chores regardless of their gender, issues of domestic violence, and the causes of domestic, the traditions held about the supremacy of the men and how they have all the rights to do whatever they wished without any contention from the spouse. His wife would occasionally steal a glance at him which made him even guiltier.

After the training, things were never the same again. Patrick's understanding of the relationship between a man and a woman in a home changed. Previously, he viewed himself as the controlling power of the house. He did not view himself as a partner or companion.

Patrick started doing things he would not ordinarily do such things as fetching water and helping the wife with the nitty-gritties of cooking as she cooked. He started seeing the value of disciplining the children together with his wife and making joint decisions on matters concerning the family. And because he reduced on his drinking, he started having more disposable income to spend on the needs of his family.

Patrick shared that the ACFODE training which he attended with his wife did not only bring calm in their marriage but also boosted their relationship with their neighbours because

they were also trained on how to relate with other members of the community. They earned respect from their neighbours because they could see the couple had tremendously changed positively; they were happier and their children of school-going age were all in school.

The couple is one of the role models and were tasked by ACFODE trainers to share their learning with other couples and other people in their community. Sarah, Patrick's wife knew a friend of hers who was doing exactly what her husband had been doing before the training; selling food from their home without

letting the husband know. Hers was a case of a wife victimising the husband; a tilt in gender relations. And because by this time they had earned themselves a lot of respect from members in the community, their friends listened to them. The change in their friends' relationships is unmistakable. They are a lot happier. Patrick and Sarah are excited that they have been part of this change. Their transformation is transforming other families.

I found my space in a Male Domain

I appreciate ACFODE so much because they have transformed me into a new being. I don't even know how to tell my story because sometimes it is even hard for me to believe that it is my story now.

Before I got trained by ACFODE, I was a drunkard in all senses of the word. I had picked this life threatening habit when I ran a bar as a young woman. I drank all the alcohol brands that I sold. I got married in 1984, but I did not stop my business. The drinking worsened because my husband too drank too much; making us two of a kind. I drank into my profits and soon into my business capital too and the inevitable happened. The business collapsed. Soon we started leaving the children in the house alone and venturing out into the local bars. He drunk from wherever he wished and I had my liberty too. I would drink and fail to locate my way home so on many occasions, I slept by the road – risky behaviour that would have led to my death.

An alcoholism survivor tells a story as Opena Moses, Barlela VSLA group interprets.



When we had no more money to spend, we initiated the Akiba group, similar to the money saving groups but for alcohol purposes. Our drinking escalated and the violence began. We started fighting and this left our children devastated. They hated our fights. The family was at the verge of collapsing.

Luckily for me, about this same time, a man called Moses Opena who had started an adult literacy group in the village approached me and asked me to join the group. He took me through the aims of the group and I picked interest and joined. The group was also functioning as a Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA). By the time I joined, ACFODE had already started supporting the group financially with grants which we would then borrow as capital for our businesses. From the interaction I had with the women in the group and all the things I had begun to learn, I started to refocus.

EVEN WHEN I JOINED MOSES, I DID NOT LEAVE THE QUARRY. AT THE BEGINNING OF 2016, I BORROWED SHILLINGS 100,000/= TO BOOST MY BUSINESS. I HIRED PEOPLE TO QUARRY FOR ME.

After the Akida idea had failed, I took to stone quarrying. There was a quarry in our village and although the business was slow, it was better than doing nothing. By the time I took to stone quarrying, I did not feel any self-worth. With Moses' group my self-worth was restored. The discussions with members of the group helped me reduce the intake of alcohol. From a

wretched 49-year-old, looking like a 65-year-old, I started healing. With this group, I started getting a different opinion of myself and even taking care of myself, which I had long stopped doing.

Even when I joined Moses, I did not leave the quarry. At the beginning of 2016, I borrowed Shillings 100,000/= to boost my business. I hired people to quarry for me. When I was doing it all by myself, I was only able to quarry stones enough to fill one small truck in three weeks and from one truck, I would raise 75,000. But with the 100,000 which I borrowed, I was able to fill a truck in just one week. This has increased my profit margin so much. It is unbelievable.

From the group, I got a goat which has multiplied my herd. The learning in the group touches on so many other aspects of our lives and because of this, I have inspired other women in this community I have learnt how to write and communicate

well with people. I have also been taught how to calculate my income and expenditure so I cannot at all be cheated. And most important, my self-confidence has improved greatly. "My message to the women is simple. I tell them: Look at me, if there is anything about me you admire, come and join the group'. And some have joined and it is clear the group is impacting their lives too.

She continues, "I have also learnt respecting other people in the community which I used not to value and I am resourceful to them as well because I lend money to some trustworthy community members sometimes.

Though I have not directly participated in the ACFODE training yet but I have learnt a lot from the members in the group who participated because of their generosity. This is a clear indication of the impact ACFODE is making in our community. I no longer fight and so I no longer bring shame to my 10 children. I have several valuable friends which was never the case when I used to drink myself silly. And I have spoken to my husband over stopping alcohol and I am hopeful that he will stop someday.

Because of ACFODE, we are the envy of the village! ACFODE has made my life very meaningful."



Courtesy of Culture, Home Can't be Home!

Talk about alienating women from themselves! Akello was born in Dokolo district in north eastern Uganda but moved to Nambiyeso village in Apac district through marriage because that is where she found love. In 2006, death visited and took her husband. That was after it had taken all her three children.

With the only child she had been left, Akello decided to pack up and return to her maiden home to live with her widowed mother who was living with one of the sons. To her surprise, it appeared that the whole community had silently conspired to frustrate her. They rejected her, started harassing her, calling her names, and questioning why she had left her marital home. She soon came face to face with the culture prescribed a different arrangement for women who left their marital homes, whether as widows or otherwise. It was painful for her to think that the people in the community, including

*Ms. Akello Stella
sharing her story
as the other group
members listen*



her childhood friends were up in arms against her. It was as if she had not had enough suffering losing her husband and her three beloved children.

"Each time I heard people back-biting me, grief engulfed me," Akello said. "Sometimes it saddened me so much that I would hide in my mother's hut and cry. I could not believe that all this was happening to me while in a place I called home.," she added. She also tried to play to the expectation of culture in regard to women. They are supposed to be brave. She says, "But I did not want my mother to ever get to see my sadness. She was a kind

woman and I did not want concerns that would worry her so most of the time, I hid my troubles from her." Everyone treated her like she was the plague itself. She was hurt by the turn of events as if there is an unwritten law about girls. They are expected to live two lives: the life before marriage and after marriage. The two lives are not supposed to cross into each other. Or even the life before marriageable age and the life after marriageable age because sometimes even unmarried women are made to suffer those discriminations.

She however vowed not to return to her marital home; at least her mother understood and supported her and this became her only consolation and source of strength. Fortunately for Akello, one of her brothers, just like her mother, was very understanding. He offered her farmland which was now under his care and told her to use it as much as she wanted. Akello planted maize, simsim, and millet which she would sell and make money to provide her mother with most of the things she needed. Her mother ceased craving for things from then on.

She was hit by the misfortune of losing the only brother who had supported her. As the world seemed to be closing in on her again, she was approached by Moses of the Berlela Women's Group who interested her in joining. The group gave her

an opportunity to reconnect with caring people and gave her a sense of belonging. Her life became lighter again and in 2015, like many other members in the group were doing after ACFODE supported them financially, she borrowed 300,000 and invested part of it in a stone-quarrying business in Berlela Village. The other sum, she rented more farm land and grew more crops. When she harvested, she added the profit she had been accumulating from the quarrying business and with this, she started building a permanent house for her mother. This changed a lot of people's perceptions about her: many had thought that she was a social misfit. Now they can see a new person altogether! She has been able to do a lot more than they are doing despite the psychological challenges she has had. The people who had been harassing her bow their heads in shame when their paths cross with hers.

Her plan is to build her own house after the child under her care is of age. She has no doubt that her future is bright. She says that if anyone gets the opportunities they are getting and they do not manage to pick themselves from the mud, they have only themselves to blame. Hers is a clear case of taking opportunity whenever it presents itself, and never giving up hope.

An Ambassador of Change – the Story of **ELEM FRANCIS**, a Retired Police Officer

I have always hated injustice and inequality even as a child. For that reason, from a very young age, I decided I wanted to be a policeman to fight injustices in my community. In addition, however, policemen in my village were always smart; they were respected; they behaved better than most other civil servants who I grew up watching. So as soon as I completed my “O” Level studies in 1973, I joined police training.

As an officer in the police force, I worked hard and found myself being entrusted with different assignments. I am happy that I married one woman because during that time marrying many women was fashionable. I survived the trap. I call it surviving because of the confusion that normally fills such polygamous homes.

I retired voluntarily in the year 2000 due to some family challenges at home. After early retirement from Police, I realised I wanted to continue working for the community. That’s how I ended up with institutions such as ACFODE. I had worked as a volunteer with Action Aid International which was working in Apac at the time. Action Aid was helping women victims of

in courts of law over land disputes. These normally arise when the husbands die and cultural beliefs take over every strand of reason.

ACFODE took me up in 2014. This was very timely because it provided me with a beautiful opportunity to create a bridge between helping women get a fair hearing over land disputes (which Action Aid was advancing) and helping the community avoid land disputes through advocating for a reduction of the negative cultural practices that cause such disputes (which ACFODE was advancing).

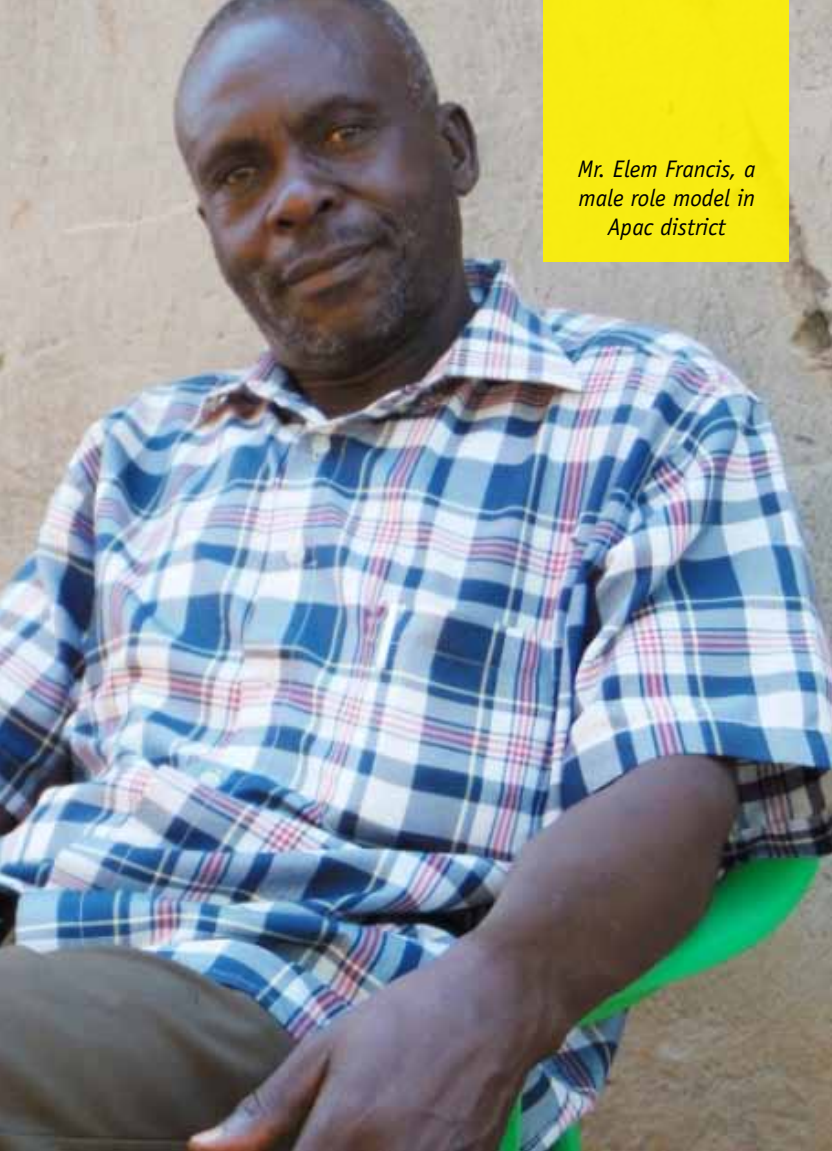
We had additional comprehensive training in 2015 focusing on working towards developing our community by empowering

women to be on equal footing with men. By the end of the training, we were all more aware of how our communities were missing out on women’s input by side-lining them through culture, tradition and other negative practices. Equipped with knowledge from ACFODE, I teamed up with other male role models to change our community. When I go to arbitrate a case, it is not just about the case. It is about changing the community. I therefore make every effort to speak against the negative cultural practices holding us back.

Whereas with Action Aid I was mainly dealing with courts of law, with ACFODE I started dealing with clan leaders, political leaders and families. I have since then solved over 15 cases very amicably.

For a long time, leaders favoured men against women without question. They favoured people with money and as a result, poor women and orphans always lost cases unfairly. Many leaders never invited the public and neighbours to attend hearing

*Mr. Elem Francis, a
male role model in
Apac district*



sessions except those who would have been bought off. My colleagues and I have emphasised a participatory approach where we encourage community members to give their opinions about the issues being discussed. This is also a mechanism for stemming the vice and increasing accountability from the people in the dispute. Success has been registered but there are still challenges of fixated mind-sets; people still believe that men should not bequeath property to women and girls. It is in the cultural fabric.

The challenges are compounded by the failure by many people who do not write Wills to help in the administration of their estates after they are dead. This has been one of the main causes of property wrangles in Apac. I have therefore included this as a topic whenever I have the opportunity to address men. There are still cases of people disrespecting the will even when the person deceased made one. Male siblings still find excuse in culture to deprive their sisters of any benefit from the

property of the dead. There was a particular case that we were able to resolve in Corner Kamdin d because a neighbour who had all along kept the deceased man's Will without disclosing to the community brought it out. He did not trust them and so he kept silent until we were invited to mediate the conflict. So trust is also another angle to some of these issues. We have earned it and now we are actual ACFODE Ambassadors. As soon as I got there, the Will surfaced. We have even been able to mediate cases that are already in court and solved them amicably. Sadly, all these involve women and girls; those that are widowed or unmarried.

We ensure that all stakeholders who are expected to be part of the proceedings are invited; clan leaders, Local Council leaders and opinion leaders and the community, especially the neighbours to the wrangling parties. These cases are not going to end today. They are embedded in our cultural systems which will not change overnight.

Being knowledgeable has been an added advantage. And with time I have gained a lot of experience from all the cases I have been involved in, I am able to handle even cases considered to be very complex. This involves a lot of tact so that one party does not feel blamed.

In 2015, after ACFODE training, I was facilitated with a bicycle to ease my mobility and this enabled me to work even on more cases across the district. As a result, I was identified and appointed by the district leadership, on the District Land Board. The board's term of service is 5 years which comes in handy. ACFODE project is coming to an end but we have remained with the skills which we are transferring into other platforms.

I have been mentoring my village-mate Mr. Owa John a retired officer who is interested in community service. I am especially interested in training clan leaders because they have power; they are the key custodians of culture and tradition. We need to make them use that power for community development and not impediment. They have influence. We need them to influence the elimination of negative cultural practices that are holding our communities back. This is when we shall see sustainable development, minimal domestic and Gender based violence against women and girls.

A Young Couple's Journey with ACFODE

No one can guess that petite Akello Nancy is already a mother. But she is. She arrives carrying a 3-months old baby. Baby Fredrick looks six months old. He does not have baby skin. It is already dark and very smooth. He smiles and bubbles in his baby language, prompting Nancy to swing him back and forth so that his baby bubbles do not develop into cries. His sharp eyes and his big, firm body lend him a mature look. When Walter says he adores Fredrick, there is no doubt.

Odong Walter is husband to Nancy, having rightfully married her after he took 5 cows to her family on 25th September 2015. He is a Radio Presenter with Radio Devine in Apac. He has decided to use that platform where he reaches a wide audience, to be an advocate of women's empowerment and an activist to promote gender responsive cultural practices.

His activism was catalysed when he heard radio presenters talking about negative cultural practices especially those

experienced in Apac. The presenters went on to say that such practices were the major causes of domestic violence and poverty in most families. They wanted volunteers who could be role models in promoting gender responsive cultural practices; Walter and Nancy decided to take up the challenge.

They found their way to ACFODE offices and were later taken for training. "We learnt a lot of things," Walter says. "But the simple of it was that equity and equality are major principles for any community to develop. If a man refuses to let his wife work, the family will miss out on her income. If a man spends all his money without discussing with his wife, he will miss out on her ideas. If there is domestic violence in a home, there will not be peace and this will impact on the partner's productivity. In the end it will not just be the partner that suffers, but the family, the community, the nation and the world."

Nancy added, "I told him that in case we were going to be

*Mr. Odong Walter,
his wife and
their son Fredrick
demonstrate
happiness in their
family.*



committed, we should not bother being part of the group. My husband agreed. Every day we must remember that we are a model couple and so we have to live by example.”

They are conscious about the big responsibility he carries as role models and this keeps them on track. It is a daily effort. Their relationship has improved tremendously and they continue to take one day at a time.”

Improved relationship has led to more benefits that they had anticipated. Open communication has enabled them plan for their resources. They managed to save and buy household items, clothes for his wife and baby, a music system and a set of chairs.

They have also managed to buy a plot of land in the Apac Town council and their next goal is to put up a building in 2017. They have acquired friends that add value to their lives unlike in the past when the people who surrounded them were drunkards. The couple have been able to do away with the violence that bedevilled their lives before their interaction with ACFODE. And for Walter, he came to understand that violence was not physical only, and he was culpable for subjecting his wife to psychological violence whenever he went on drinking sprees and never returned home.

He still goes to the bar but regulates himself. He does not force his wife into sex

when he returns smelling of alcohol; sometimes he even opts to make his bed on the floor. Their sexual relationship has improved as well. True to tradition, Nancy never shared what she was going through with anyone. This is what “good” wives do. But what matters is that now he cares. Even when he goes to the bar he does not drink as much as he used to. My husband is now helping our friends who have domestic challenges. He goes to their homes and they also come looking for him.”

“I no longer admire getting drunk. I do not admire to be in that silly state of useless drunkenness. That’s why we have this handsome baby boy,” Walter concludes.

The Rising Boat



In 2015 Moses invited my wife and I to his office. At first I wondered what he wanted from us but we still went there any way. When we got there, he told us that he wanted to work with us to build gender responsive social cultural values among our people. He told us that he had heard about the domestic violence in our home and that he was willing to work with us towards reforming and that we would be the right people to help others in a similar position.

Much as I am 43 years, I behaved as a teenager. I did not believe I could reform but I decided to give it a try. What surprised me in these discussions was the fact that I had not realised that, actually, I needed to reform. When you invite madness into your head, it takes over your mind and completely changes you into something else. You even stop knowing who you are.

So how does a man who has forgotten who he is become a role model? ACFODE took us for training at Mayov Hotel and by the time we completed the training, I had regained

my self-esteem and was ready to take the male role model challenge. I knew it was a challenge because for many years my lifestyle was different from what the new status demanded. I had to banish the madness that I had invited into my head. At the training I met many people who ACFODE had approached. When we shared during the training, it occurred to us that all the couples present had challenges which were tearing their relationships down. I became comforted by the fact that I was not alone and that all of us were seeking to reform. It was no longer a personal challenge.

When you see my wife today, she rides a bicycle and sells vegetables and fruits. She is in charge of our home as much as I am. She can call me and say, "Today, do not bring meat home. I have already bought some. But you can bring rice or posho instead." This always pleases me and I get angry at the years I spent controlling her.

These days I don't know the price of salt. It is not only about small things. When

I think of buying a cow for instance, I discuss with her and she even contributes from her own business. She is her own boss but she contributes to family income and upkeep. The truth is that my wife started her business after the ACFODE training. I gave her small facilitation to start with.

After we got married, I thought it was my duty to look after her. So I did not allow her to work, not even when she asked me. Culturally, for a man to have authority, he must provide for his wife and children. So, I wanted to uphold that belief. Her duty was to be home and cook, give me children, wash my and other family members' clothes, and give me sex. I did not even know that women needed to be ready for sex. By the way many men are like me. They just climb as if she is a bicycle without realising that she too needs to be ready.

I did not realise that by controlling her, I was controlling her creativity and thus controlling her contribution to the family. Before we joined ACFODE, I never allowed her to ride a bicycle. I thought that

good women should not ride – not my woman. But also I had one old bicycle which was not even in good condition. So most likely it was a mix of fear and meanness of not wanting her to ride my already shaky bicycle and being controlling. Now she rides; I have not lost my authority. She contributes to family livelihood; I have not lost my authority. I wash with her our clothes and iron them and I have not lost my manhood. Instead, we have become a happier family and we have acquired some property. We still struggle but it is teamwork and I am enjoying myself. I am sure my wife too loves our relationship now. I remember for example I never used to disclose to my wife what I would earn. Many men do not disclose their income. As a result, the women are always guessing and sometimes wrongly which also causes disgruntlement and sometimes fights. My wife knows what I earn and that helps us to plan together. Hiding information from your partner is like being in a prison. All the time you carry all the money with you. When she sees it you start to make up stories. I now leave everything in the open and so does she.

For those who did not know me, it was difficult to believe that I am a trained carpenter. I studied carpentry and Joinery at Future Prospects Technical Institute. Interestingly, I started drinking heavily around

2001 after I completed school and started working. You see drinking alcohol is common to technicians because they get very tired both mind and body and so it starts as an innocent process to relax then it transforms into something else that you cannot control.

Before I became a male role model with ACFODE, I lived in a grass-thatched hut and I never saw anything wrong with that despite my education and the money I was making from my carpentry work. Shamelessly, when I would be going home drunk in the night, I would move shouting at the top of my voice, telling nobody in particular, that I was on my way to my home as if anyone would stop me any way. As if it was a home to be proud of. What, with the amount of alcohol that would be on my head! I would start in the morning and drink until there would be no more money in my pocket. When I would get home, I would beat my wife.

I do not remember a single day when I had a sound reason to beat her. Of course now I know better. I know that a woman is never to be beaten. But I always found reasons to beat her. Today it would be the food temperature not being exactly what I wanted – too hot or too cold. Tomorrow, it would be the warm water she has given me when I wanted cold. The following day it would be the cold water when I wanted

hot. My wants always shifted for purposes of finding reasons to fight. She therefore could never predict what would or would not start off a quarrel. Sometimes I would miss lunch and when I would get home for supper, I would demand for the lunch plate to be brought to the table too. Of course it would not be there because maybe the children would have eaten it. When the plate would be there I would ask her if she thought I was a pig to eat two plates. I always found a reason.

Being humble, my wife never fought back and I took advantage of that – to beat her up as much as I wanted or even to send her out of the hut that we shared. She would take all the nonsense quietly and wait for daybreak to tell me. Of course I would deny. I would deny all the stupid things of darkness even those which would be obvious like vomit on beddings I would be covered in.

Every day we were getting poorer. I spent every coin I got on alcohol. We possessed nothing in our huts. But maybe that was better because perhaps I would have sold household things to go and drink. We had no single animal. We had no chairs in the house. Our children were going to the worst schools because I never paid fees. All I possessed was the ramshackle bicycle which I had failed to either repair or replace.

Today, when I look at my 3-bedroom iron-sheets house, my motorcycle, my wife's bicycle, my children's bicycle, two cows and a goat and other things that we have bought for the house, I wonder why it took me so long. Why it took ACFODE long to come and tell me that I needed to change. But maybe it shows that we all need each other. I am doing my best to help others sailing in the same sinking boat that I sailed for years which must become a rising boat. I am now a leader in church. I am the youth chairperson. I find every opportunity to speak about the things that hold us backwards. I encourage people to break free from unhelpful practices (individual or cultural) in order to move forward.

One of the youths I have been counselling, for example, has started fish business to boost the income of his household instead of spending his time at the bar. Some people, especially those who knew me as the village drunkard, just come to me for advice because they see tremendous change with my family.

The Magic of “Talking Compounds”

Apiny Jaster Okello seats behind the desk in her office. Her tall figure towers over the little desk. The shine of her dark skin lends her a gorgeous look. A deep dimple seats into her left cheek as she smiles showing off the awards that her school won for the Talking Compounds; a project of ACFODE, in selected primary schools. Ms Apiny is the Headmistress of Olili Primary school. She is visibly happy for being part of the project and when she is asked why, she says that she has always considered herself a role model and is always taking it upon herself to be a role model in Olili Primary school where ACFODE was encouraging pupils and teachers to be role models.

Although Ms Apiny is a mother of five, her waistline is admirable. It is clear that she is not only brainy and a leader, but she also cares about the way she looks and the way she presents herself. “I am the first woman head teacher of this school. It had always been men until I got to be given the opportunity. So I have to show the boys that women too are able leaders and I have to demonstrate to the girls that they too must aim at taking up leadership positions in future.”

Ms Apiny's testimony is not in her words only but there's a lot to show for her words. When she was transferred to Olili Primary school as a head teacher, she found that the school was in a dangerous condition. Close to the school

was a large depression which was being used as a stone quarry. It was not safe for the pupils because sometimes they would go and hide there but also the men in the stone quarry could not be trusted with the girls in school. She mobilised resources from school management and PTA (Parents Teachers Association) and they filled up the quarry. “That's why you see a beautiful compound because after filling it we levelled it to create a playground.”

On the Head teacher's table, there is a plaque from ACFODE for winning the Talking Compounds Competition. Ms Apiny says that the plaque is an important reminder to their commitment to causing change. “When we talk to students, sometimes they

Ms. Apiny Jaster
Okello in her office
at Olili Primary
School.



ignore us. When we are from the same communities it is even worse. But when we get projects like these where other people come and speak to the pupils, they realise that we are not alone in what we tell them. They realise that the rest of the world is changing. For example in this community, when girls get pregnant, they drop out of school while the boys who make them pregnant continue with their studies. We just had a girl who completed here after she gave birth. Whereas other schools could not take her on, we at Olili Primary school recognised her plight and took her on. She did not have any challenge at all while here. The school community was very supportive. We need more schools to be like that."

Ms Apiny explains that the messages in the compound help the children to interact

with and understand new realities. "We get goats and cows which destroy the message stands and thieves who steal the scrap but we shall ensure to put them back because they are important. Sometimes we take it for granted that pupils are in class together and that they will all study and perform well. What we don't know is that at the back of their mind, they are controlled by many things they come to class with. Those are the things these messages address. Talking compounds are for real. They hold conversations with students every time they engage the students in reading them. As a result, there is improved competition between boys and girls. The girls report the boys when they are touched inappropriately or when they are insulted." Some of the messages on the compound

include; Avoid Gifts for sex. Girls and Boys have equal rights and responsibilities. Avoid early marriages. Early pregnancy kills.

Olili is transforming itself into a model school. The current head prefect is a girl - Angwech Salome. According to the senior male teacher Mr. Okello Ambrose, the project has created incredible changes. "The girls used to sweep classrooms without complaining because culturally it is girls who sweep at home. This culture was transplanted from the home setting to school. We also did not think about it as wrong practice since the girls were not complaining. These days we have a rota which ensures that they all participate in sweeping and mopping the floor. When practices and traditions are with us daily,

they become the norm. Girls would for example never report if a boy did anything to them. All that has changed!”

Ms. Okello further explains that the school has grown under the management of a woman. She has bought more land for the school and applied for land titles for all the school land. We have started a Girls Football Team and it is interesting watching them play the boys team with so much confidence. Before you do something you are indeed ignorant.

All the pupils who went for ACFODE training on children’s rights and obligations in 2014 have long left the school because they were in primary seven and six. They however formed The Accountability Club which attracted other pupils in lower classes. Samson and Daniella, both in Primary six, now and 13years old, always give sensitisation talks at assembly. They put together what to say at assembly from Accountability Club meetings which are always held on Fridays. It is a small club but so is the school. Though small, the club has registered a lot

of success. For instance, there is a nearby village known as Akar where almost all girls never completed p7. That was the tradition with no major explanation except the quarry near the school. The girls from Akar now complete P7 and even go to secondary school.

It is only 3 years since the Accountability Club started in Olili Primary School but the results are tremendous, not only in the school but the community as well. When these children go back to their communities they carry the same messages.

Young People take on Advocacy to Change their Community

It is the wall Poster from ACFODE which helped me to get audience with my friend’s father. We had received the posters at the ACFODE training where I went with my fellow students. We went six of us. People from ACFODE visited our school and met 28 of us; 14 boys and 14 girls. They talked about children’s rights and cultural practices that make children not realise their dreams. They trained 6 of us along many other students from other schools. By the end of the training, we were all excited about the new knowledge we had acquired. We were told to return and work towards making our schools and communities understand children’s rights not just as an issue of government but an issue that would help us become a better society.



My name is Ain Moses. As you might guess, I do not come from very far. My village is just behind my school, Akokoro Secondary school. It is not even 2 km from here. After returning from ACFODE training, I started to look back at what was happening in my village. We are very close to Lake Kwanja and River Nile. Many children here drop out of school to go fishing. I and a few other children have been lucky to be in school. For me I have been luckier because at the end of 2015 I was voted by students, teachers and other school workers, as The Student of the Year. I know that

practicing some of the things I learnt from ACFODE contributed to my achieving that. As luck would have it, I have also excelled in my studies. Since last year, I have been receiving school bursary. When you are the best in class the school gives you bursary. God knows how this bursary has helped me. You see my shirt - it is torn. I should have bought another. I have not. That should tell you something. This bursary is not just helping my parents save their money but its helping them pay fees for my siblings.

Before I joined the ACFODE Club,

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I KNOW THAT PRACTICING SOME OF THE THINGS I LEANT FROM ACFODE CONTRIBUTED TO MY ACHIEVING THAT. AS LUCK WOULD HAVE IT, I HAVE ALSO EXCELLED IN MY STUDIES. SINCE LAST YEAR, I HAVE BEEN RECEIVING SCHOOL BURSARY. WHEN YOU ARE THE BEST IN CLASS THE SCHOOL GIVES YOU BURSARY.

A student of Akokoro SS narrates a story about the poster.





I WAS VERY EXCITED. I KNEW THAT I HAD WON. I RUN TO HIS HOME AND SPOKE TO THE GIRL. I TOLD HER THAT SHE SHOULD BE WELL-BEHAVED AND DO WHATEVER IT WOULD TAKE TO PLEASE HER FATHER SO THAT HE DOES NOT CHANGE HIS MIND. INDEED THE GIRL IS NOW IN SCHOOL.

I was part of the patriotism club. Maybe that is why the teacher on duty asked me to be part of the ACFODE club. I know I have to be a helpful member of the community and not just a member going through school. For instance in Patriotism Club we learn how to neutralise a brewing strike.

ACFODE Club has added new aspects. In this village, it is girls who sweep and mop the floor. When they come to school, they continue doing that. It was normal for boys never to sweep or mop classes. Since ACFODE training, all classes have sweeping lists which have both boys and girls and they do not even protest. It was a bit difficult at the start but they have all accepted now that we are all equal and should do the same work at home and at school. I know some of us may not do it at home but at least when they are aware, then you know that they are just taking advantage. And it helps the girls to also refuse because they know it is okay for them alone to do all the work. Also there used to be only a few girls in students leadership. Today we have twenty two prefects - eleven girls and eleven boys. I am one of the prefects.

When I had just come to this school, there was a man who used vulgar language with girls. As soon as we returned from the ACFODE training, we asked the senior woman and senior man teachers to speak to the

teacher. We told them that if he did not stop, we would talk about it on assembly. A few days later, the man stopped. We don't know whether it was the senior woman or senior man teacher who talked to him but for us we achieved our target.

The poster I got from ACFODE had a message for young people. There was this friend of mine in our village who had completed primary seven and her father had told her that she was not going to continue to secondary school. Since it was the father paying her school fees, she could not do anything about the situation. Other children started senior one and she stayed at home. One day, during holidays, I went to her mother and told her that it was wrong for them not to let the girl continue in school. She told me that it was the father who had the authority to decide on children's school. I had to find a way of helping this girl.

On another day I offered to dig for him again. In our village, it is not strange for people to dig for each other in groups. I made sure that my oxen were next to his. We dug a bit then I asked him about the daughter and why she had not gone to senior one. He told me that girls were getting pregnant from secondary school. He gave me an example of a girl from our neighbouring village of Abalokweri. I gave him examples of girls who had finished and were helping their

parents. He still did not listen to me.

I told him that not all girls were getting pregnant. I told him that these days there are many organisations helping girls to stay in school without getting pregnant. I told him about ACFODE and what we had been told at the training camp and how all of us were being encouraged to be each other's keeper. He said I was a liar and that he would not trust me. "Those are stories you are telling me. When my daughter gets pregnant, it's my family which will suffer with her. Let her be here until she gets married peacefully," he said to me. That evening I went home knowing I had failed to convince him but I was determined not to give up.

On a third attempt, I carried my poster from ACFODE. I talked to him again and told him that I was ready to help if he agreed to send the girl back to school. "How will you do it?" He asked me. I told him that I would speak to the girl because I had a lot of helpful information from ACFODE. "You keep talking about ACFODE ACFODE. What shows you have been in training with them?" He challenged. I flipped open my poster for him to read since I knew he knew English. He got it from me and read. Your Body is precious. Say No to Early Sex. He looked at me for some seconds before speaking then he said, "You are young and you don't know many things. Since you have insisted, I will send her to school. However, it will not be secondary school. I will send her to technical school.

I was very excited. I knew that I had won. I run to his home and spoke to the girl. I told her that she should be well-behaved and do whatever it would take to please her father so that he does not change his mind. Indeed the girl is now in school. I also told her that it was her right to go school and that in case the father remains adamant, she should not just keep quiet.

My next target is to help a widow in my village. My community does not respect widows. Even the next village of Apoi is the same. They send widows out of their homes as soon as their husbands die.

They don't even think about the children. Because our land is communal, as soon as a man dies, the land does not entirely belong to his family. The clan makes decisions over all the land.

The widow in my village has 4 children but I have heard that the clan has been planning to send her away. I do not doubt because I have seen it happen before. When the clan chases away widows, they leave them to decide whether they want to go with the children or to leave them behind. And when they leave them behind, no one is concerned about them. It is only very strong women who struggle against the clan setting. Many women leave and carry their children because they do not want them to suffer. Other widows leave the children behind especially those who know that they will not be able to look after the children at their parent's homes. It is a tricky situation because even when they get to their families, their own clans do not welcome the orphans because they belong to another clan. This puts the widows in a very difficult situation. No one blames them when they eventually leave the children and go away without looking behind. If you walk in our village now, there are very many child-headed families.

My plan is to ask my parent's for advice about this widow because I know I cannot just go to clan leaders. If I did, they would say

I have become a disobedient child. A child does not approach clan leaders. I will also go to one clan leader who is our neighbour at home. I will speak to him like a child seeking to understand then; I will put my request to him to help the woman. Our neighbour is a good man so I believe he will not be unhappy with me. If he does not help the widow, I will go and tell her about ACFODE and take her to their office. Maybe they can then direct her to another office which might be of help to her. I will also ask my mother to speak to her. My mother is a member of ACFODE Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA). She might help her.

There are many issues in our community and we need to use all the students to address these issues. Maybe our next club project should be a Talking Compound with messages that talk about these issues so that all the children read the messages every day. I am thinking of messages such as; Girls too should go to school. Widows should not be sent away from marital homes, Children should not be forced to be family heads. Boys and girls have equal rights. Women and men should have equal say on what they harvest. Maybe we can also make posters like ACFODE. With time, the students will learn to take these messages to their communities when they go back for holiday. If we all work together we shall make a difference in our village.

Richard Ngoro at his home in Akokoro sub-county in Apac district

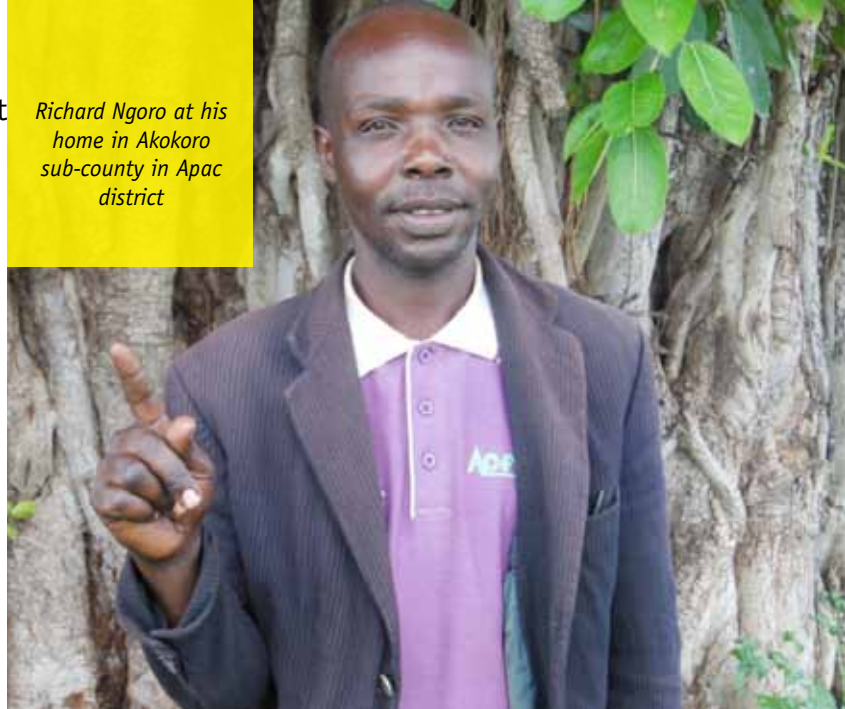
The New Generation of Gender Equality Male Advocates

Richard Ngoro is from Tetugu village in Akokoro sub-county. He is 35 years old. He is married with four children and when asked how many more he wants to have, he smiles and asks, "Do I really need more? I think those are enough considering the current situation where school fees and child upkeep has become a big challenge."

Richard was asked by ACFODE to be a role model in 2014 and he has since then been involved in fighting the war against negative social cultural beliefs which he says have been responsible for keeping Tetugu backwards. He moves around the village sensitising people and with the permission of the catechist in the church he goes to, he speaks to the congregation whenever there are opportunities. "I speak at Village Council meetings as well. LC leaders always organise different meetings on health, education and cultural values. I do not miss these meetings. Because of how we take this assignment, sometimes people think that we are paid. I talk about girl child education, the negative cultural practices, early marriages, fighting in homes, husbands denying their wives what they harvest, property ownership, selling property without consent of wives, and much more."

Richard says that he has other role models he works with and as a result of their interaction with people, many things are changing. "If you ask me today, I will tell you that the situation is different from what it was a few years ago. Those days, women and girls would get raped and they would never report. The community would somehow get to know but they would close their eyes, block their ears and pretend that there was calm. Sometimes when the women and girls would brave it and report, the crime preventers would instead side with the criminals against the victims."

Richard has been involved in many cases which he has helped to solve. He says that because Tetugu is near Kaye Landing site, it is a village with many influences. It is like a town. People come from different villages and districts to settle here. "And you know





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the behaviour of lake-men. Most times they behave as if they will not be alive the following day. So they have no problem squandering their money. As a result, they lure young girls for sex because they give them money. Many people in this village are poor and so the girls accept small gifts in exchange for sex. Many girls from Tetugu and all these villages drop out of school and go to Kaye. Kaye has become a business centre. The girls who do not drop out will still exhibit a lot of absenteeism.

Since Richard and his colleagues started their work in the community, they collaborate with police and the OC at Akokoro Sub-county. They have turned the crime preventers into collaborators to report especially on early marriages and on those who try to obstruct justice. That way, everything comes to our attention.

Richard says that somehow, each role model has their passion and people in this community also report to him when they detect a problem. "Mine is girl's education. Sometime back crime preventers reported to me a defilement case of a thirteen year old school girl. I reported to police and the culprit was hunted down and arrested. He was taken to the district magistrate where he was charged and sentenced. To-date the defiler is still locked up.

Unfortunately, the girl eventually dropped out of school. Richard tried to follow up but he did not succeed. The head-teacher informed him that the girl started by being irregular at school until she just disappeared. "I think she was not able to deal with rape. It is ironical that when a girl gets raped, she ceases to be a victim. Instead she becomes the guilty one. She becomes guilty for getting raped. Everybody points fingers at her. I am sure that is what she feared in school." When Richard followed up with the girl, she informed him that her parents always neglected and never provided for her needs. They would go to drink in the morning and they would return in the evening. The girl would fetch water from the village borehole and sell 20 litres of water at five hundred shillings to enable her provide for herself. She confided in Richard that that was how she first

met her defiler and he started supporting her, buying for her even scholastic materials and clothes. Then they ended up having sex. Much as Richard sympathised with her, it was still defilement and that is why the man was sentenced. He counselled her and asked her to go back to school but she did not stay there long and he did not know where to find her anymore because she left her home and left the village.

Richard works in partnership with other role models. He remembers a case which was reported to him about a couple which was fighting almost twice a week and for no reason at all except that the man was always drunk. He was a fisherman at Kaye but he would get fish and sell all of it. He never gave any of it to the family. He never helped the wife in the gardens. He never cared or even seemed to notice that his children were not going to school. In short, his family was none of his business. The Lc1 Chairman was tired of listening to their cases.

When the wife called Richard to intervene, he did not know how he would help them. They seemed to be beyond help. "Sometimes you get a case and you do not know what to do with it. I consulted the LC1 Chairman, and he told me what their problems were. I knew it was the man with a challenge but I did not know how to handle." Richard organised

a meeting and he asked the head of the clan and another Male Role Model to go with him to meet the couple.

Richard and his team did not start off by accusing the fisherman. "Instead we asked him to state what his problem was. He said that his wife was not respectful and that was why he was beating her and neglecting her to do her own things. The wife responded and told him that she respected him. She said she was humble and hard-working and that's why she was working to support him. She had even built two houses. The man on the other hand felt that the woman was doing all that to prove that she did not need him. As they talked and explained to each other whatever they felt, they realised it had been a big misunderstanding. Richard and his colleagues tried to explain the benefits of cooperation between husband and wife. The fisherman promised that he was going to change. To-date Richard checks on him to ensure that change is a continuous reality. "This is our village. These are our people. ACFODE has helped us to start. We must not relax. This is our war. We must fight it."

Empower Women, Eliminate their Dependency

My name is Susan Akullu. I am 24 years old. Our sub-county is called Ibuje. I grew up in Ibuje and got married in Ibuje. I have climbed Olum rock. I have one child. I should have had another child but I have not because I no longer live with my husband. I don't even know whether to call him my husband because he never married me official. You know a man falls in love with a girl and he asks her to move in with him. That's how it was with us. That was in 2010.

It was hardly one year after moving in that he started mistreating me. I lost so much weight because of having nothing to eat. He would not buy me food and yet he did not have land for us to grow our own crops. All the clothes I had gone with became tatters and he did not buy me anything. In our culture, a man should look after a wife. I expected him to buy me clothes but he did not buy me anything. When I got pregnant, not only did he fail to buy for me the things I would crave but almost starved me to death. We lived in a small grass-thatched house. I thought I was

going to die. In 2013, I moved out back to my mother. I lost my father when I was a small girl. My mother has been both my mother and my father.

After one month, my husband came for me. My mother asked him to go back and return with some form of bride price to at least show that he was committed to staying with me and looking after me and my baby. He told her that he was going to look for the money and return. It is now November 2016. He is still looking. Without remorse, he calls me almost every day asking me to return to him and swearing to look after me. I don't know why but he has not married another woman. I think that's why he wants me to go. He wants a woman in his life but not the responsibility that goes with it.

My return to my mother was almost like from a frying pan into the fire. She also has a small piece of land which was given to her by her parents. Her husband, my father, had several wives, five to be specific. They all had children and there were other children from other

Ms. Akullu Susan at her home in Ibuje sub-county, Apac district



women he had affairs with but never married. After father's death, my mother packed all her children, seven of us, I being the youngest, and went back to her parents. In our community, it is not uncommon for women to go back to their parents with their children. My mother struggled with us, and even tried to educate us by distilling and selling waragi and planting crops for sale. My brothers eventually went back and inherited some land from my father's clan but I never got anything. Girls are not given anything to inherit. I could say, I was beginning to be desperate. My mother's piece of land is very small. It was not sustaining us. Imagine a 21-year old girl with a child on her back and nothing to feed her.

One day I was at home and I heard over the radio that an organisation called ACFODE was looking for child mothers. They also mentioned who the programme coordinator was and I realised I knew Mr Owino Jasper. When we met and he asked me to join them, I did not hesitate. He said that I needed to start saving 2,500 Uganda shillings. I looked for little money and started to make pancakes. Slowly by slowly I started to save without hustle. When you are alone in your home, you think that you are the only one with problems. When I got to the young mothers group, I found there a number of other young mothers, some even younger than me. Others were even worse off than me.

We would share our challenges, our joys our small achievements and we started to rebuild our self-esteem. A failed marriage or relationship can make you feel useless. It can make you feel like you are a no-body. I don't know how best to put it but it can make you feel you are less of a woman.

For example before I joined this group I did not even know that I could be a group leader. Now I am the chairperson of the group. Earlier, all the groups I would be in the chairpersons would be either men or older experienced women. Now here I am leading fellow women, setting the group's agenda, chairing meetings, giving ideas on how to progress. The other women look up to me and I

look up to them. We all support one another.

In 2015 ACFODE gave us money and by then I had learnt that I could actually do business. From pancakes I had started getting food for my child. ACFODE trained us on how to manage the grant and how to manage loans. For three months I did not borrow. I first wanted to be sure of how I would use the money. In April 2006 I requested for a loan of 300,000 Uganda Shillings from the group. I took all of it and invested in fish business.

I realised that the more money one had the better it would be for the business. I went to my brother and spoke to him. I asked him to lend me 200,000. He agreed. My capital increased my chances of making more money. I buy fish from the landing site and send it to Kampala. If you go to Nakawa market you find my fish. I work with my cousin. I send her the fish she sends the money after she has sold and so far we work well together because she never had a proper job.

Somebody who saw me a few years ago cannot believe that I am the one. I was almost in rags. Now I have clothes. I have food for my child and I even support my mother. Those days I used to think that a man should look after his wife. That is what I had grown up seeing. That is why I would be home waiting for the father of my child to

bring us food and clothes. Now I know that I do not need a man to support me. I can support myself. I am supporting myself. Maybe if I had known that earlier, I would even have started business from his home. Instead, I contented myself with feelings of worthlessness until I walked away.

Sometimes I get disturbed by seasons. There is little fish during the dry season and it gets expensive when we eventually find it. During the rainy season, we get a lot of it and many people take a lot of it to Kampala then it floods the markets and prices are cut. At the base they do not give us major discounts and so we sometimes lose. But every business is a struggle and so I have learnt to be patient and not to look backwards.

If my business hits a rock, I will still not suffer too much because I have bought a cow recently. I know it will soon give me calves and more cows. My worry now is that I might not get married again because now I realise that I do not need a man to look after me. Women must change their attitude. One of the reasons we suffer in marriage is that when the men take us, it comes with a promise that they are going to look after us and we also believe them. Women need to go into marriage knowing that they can look after themselves. And men should not promise heaven when they know they will not do it. Entertaining thoughts of being looked after is what



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cripples women sometimes.

I always thought I would never survive without a man. Now I know better – women do not need men to survive. Men should let their wives venture into whatever can give them income. If I get married now, it will be on my terms not just to follow the man with empty promises. Men do not need to put themselves at a level they are not. They are human after all, just like women.

Susan concludes her story and turns to look across the Olum rock which is said to have footprints and the Mweso game.

It was as if we were **ALL MENTALLY ILL**

Oceng Godfrey is one of the few educated men who live back home in Ibutje. He holds a Certificate in Social Work and Social Administration from Makerere University. He has six children from three marriages.

When Oceng was in senior six in a school in Lira Town, he impregnated his girlfriend who was at the time in senior three at Ikweru Girls' school. Oceng says, "We liked each other a lot and so we decided to get married instead of carry out an abortion. I went to her parents and paid bride-wealth. In my clan you do not stay with a woman if you have not paid bride-wealth. We agreed that she would go back to school later.

She gave birth to a baby girl but when the baby was one year, the woman died just like that." Oceng was called from school and he could not believe it. At first he thought they were lying to him because he had just been with her only a few hours ago. A few days before, he was at school and he felt like going back home to see her and indeed he went home. He stayed 3 days at home and had talked and shared their future plans. She had however mentioned to him that she felt unwell and

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that she was afraid she might die in his absence. He had not taken her seriously and had laughed at her remark telling her not to say such things. He

left home in the afternoon and went back to Lira.

In the evening when he was called and told to return home because the wife was very sick, he told them that she would be fine. They insisted that he should go. When he got home, he found people on vigil. He could not believe. "My wife was dead. It took me a long time to believe that the woman I had just been with was now dead. I even felt as if it was just a trick. How could she just die? Then I remembered what she had told me - that she might die - and how I had not taken her seriously. I could not forgive myself. I felt that maybe I did not listen to her enough to save her life. I was devastated for years and even failed to continue with studies," Oceng says.

When I got home my people told me that she had said I should always keep our child and that I should not give her to other people. That was all she had asked them to tell me. Those words still bring tears to my eyes sometimes. She was from a family background of separated parents. Maybe that's why she wanted me to keep the baby. The following day we buried her

*Godfrey Oceng
narrates a story as
his wife sits down
next to him.*



and I stayed home to mourn her. After four days of mourning my father told me to go back to school but I could not bring myself to go to class and study. That was the end of school for me. After a few months I went for mechanics in Lira Town. I did not work as a mechanic for long because I decided to go for a certificate in Social Work and Social Administration.

I married my current wife in the year 2000. I could not stay with my daughter alone any longer. I needed a woman to help me look after her. We men have that mentality. We always think that women are better care-

givers. Maybe it's true but not entirely. My second wife did not take long before she produced her own child – a son. When you love a woman, you love that woman's children. It was more with my daughter. Because she was an orphan, I found that I loved her more than other children. Somehow I knew that they had a mother to love them. She did not have a mother so I almost wanted to love her double. As a result, when she would report any abuse, I would be very angry with my wife and her children. It was so bad that I just could not control myself. The child would sometimes run away from home and go to her

grandmother. The grandmother lives in the neighbourhood. I would follow the child there and get her and tell them to stop encouraging her to go there. The grandmother would follow me quarrelling and telling me that we were torturing her granddaughter. I would get infuriated. I was in the middle of something like a fire. What helped me was that my family was there for me. They encouraged me a lot.

In 2006 I decided to have a relationship with another woman. After the death of my first wife, life had never been the same again. I always felt

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as if I lacked something that only she had provided me. Our people say that when one has had severe problems, they can only get worse. My third wife was still a student when we started dating. Her father asked me for five cows for taking her out of school. I paid through my teeth. As soon as I cleared if off, the girl started acting funny. I realised that she had mental problem. I consulted her parents but they ignored me. I got to learn from people that she had always had a mental problem. Most people in the village knew, except me. I got angry with her parents especially because of taking my five cows well knowing that their daughter had a problem.

But I liked her. We actually loved each other. Even now she calls me and tells me she misses me. Any way as I will learn later, she lives at her home.

Unfortunately, for us, or maybe fortunately, she had already become pregnant by the time I got to know her mental status. I stayed with her trying different remedies but nothing worked. I consulted elders and the clansmen. They advised that I take her back to her people to also try and find a solution to her illness. That is what I did. She left two sons with me. The woman I married has three children but she stays with all the six children.

Before my third wife left, violence had started in my home. Violence actually entered my home with that third wife. She would fight with the second woman until the entire village would gather around them. They became the talk of the village. I would be in the bar and see people running to call me to go and separate my wives. They would fight at our home. They would fight at my father's home. They would fight at my grandfather's home. They would fight on the road. They would fight at the market and the trading centre. They would fight anywhere and anytime. That is how I came to be known as the husband of the fighting women. I started to get involved in the fights because I was also getting frustrated. And I already had bias on the second wife because

of the little girl from my dead wife. My family became a battle ground. It was as if we were all mentally ill.

When the mentally ill woman left, I remained unhappy with the second woman. We still did not become friends as husband and wife should be. I was not looking after the children well and was not buying anything at home. In 2014, I was asked to join ACFODE. I must say that ACFODE has helped me because although I am struggling, I am making an effort. I see progress at different fronts. In 2015 I was elected on Child Protection and the Parish Development committee. I am also appointed to advise the elderly in my cell. When we go to the sub-county I also get paid. When I arrive in a place, people say, ACFODE has arrived and they give me duties. ACFODE has given me a certificate to serve my community. It is not a certificate on paper, no. It is what I carry in my heart. When I am called for cases, I carry my book and record because I know that is important to have evidence. Sometimes I am called to give an account of things and because I have them recorded I get no trouble. I am even a source of information sometimes. I have done a lot for this community but I will not elaborate. Instead I will send you to the village to go and ask. People will tell you. For example if you want I can call you my neighbour and you speak with him and his wife.



A SETTLED marriage FINALLY

The practice of picking one's bride wealth from his father-in-laws' home after separating with his wife is a fairly common practice in Apac district in northern Uganda. Ocing Jimmy Alex, whose first wife left, resenting his alcoholism and the severe beatings that she had endured for so long decided

he would go and ask for his cows and goats back. He had married a very peaceful woman. She never liked the way her husband drunk. He drank too much and every night, he would return home swearing upon his dead parents' names and shouting on top of his voice. He would get home; ask

for food items that they rarely had at their home. She would serve him what every other member of the home would have had for the meal but he would quarrel and beat her. The two had been married since 1994 but this fate of alcohol was bound to separate them as she would not endure it any

*Mr. Ocing Jimmy
with his wife and
children outside
their home*



further. She had three children with Ocing and they were all young and each time she planned to leave, she hesitated a bit to think how the children would cope without her. But the fights just continued day in day out. So one fine day, she made up her mind and left her

marital home, leaving all the children behind.

Ocing had paid 5 cows, 4 goats and some money for bride price. He knew the practice was that if one has not sent away his wife himself, he could go to his in-laws and demand for what belonged to him. So he went to collect his animals! His in-laws were only able to give him 4 of the 5 cows but gave him all the goats he had given them. No money was given to him but Ocing was happy all the same. He knew that with 4 cows and 4 goats, he would still be able to find a wife and that was all that mattered at that moment. He was happy to bring his animals back to his home. And as usual, he continued drinking his alcohol.

Taking care of the children the woman had left behind was hard for him although he was doing it together with his extended family. He had not anticipated the nitty-gritties of have the children eaten, have they bathed, gone to school, etcetera. It was a difficult task. And while in the meantime he was trying to find a woman to marry, some of the women he would approach would refuse him because they knew the way he conducted himself and how he had treated his separated wife. Others knew he had children and told him they were not willing to come to a home which already had children. He struggled looking for a wife for about a year and then he found one. With the

bride wealth he had retrieved from his wife's parent's home, he married the second wife.

Two years into the marriage, the second wife asked her husband to take away the three children, reminding him that they had their own mother. He just kept quiet and hoped she would not bring up the subject again. But she did it again and again and although she pestered him many more times, he ignored her. This made her angry.

Beth's anger ate up on her from the inside like a bean weevil devours the bean seed. One day when she had a small fight with one of the three children, she stabbed him on the leg and injured him badly. Chased by guilt, she ran to her parents' home. Her husband followed her there to demand for his cows and goats, but his father-in-law wasn't ready to make it easy for him.

So Ocing decided to get the cows himself. One night he went to his father-in-laws kraal and drove out only those cows he had paid as his dowry. He could not find the goats so he only took the cows. The following morning when his father-in-law discovered that his cows were not in the kraal, he knew it was Ocing owing to how he had left them the day he was denied the cows. The old man went and reported the matter to police and policemen opted to move with him to



his son-in-law's place. Ocing was not willing to give up his cows no matter what. The police threatened to take him to prison and he said he would only go to prison if allowed to go with his cows. The police asked the old man why he had let the daughter stay in his house without him trying to resolve the matter after she left her marriage and he had nothing to say. The policemen stared at the two men, the men stared back. They stared at each other for so long before the police asked the men to sit, talk and resolve their matters. When they talked, the father-in-law wanted Ocing's wife to return but Ocing had no intentions of having his wife back. Because his wife had gone back to her parents' home with the son, Ocing agreed with his in-laws that he would give them one cow for his milk which he did.

About one year later, Ocing met and married another young woman but this cycle would have gone on and on if it wasn't for the intervention of Action for Development (ACFODE). In 2014, ACFODE with the help of local leaders in Apac, identified and invited Ocing to participate in a training that involved political leaders, religious leaders, and cultural leaders. The all gathered at Mayov Hotel in Apac town and were trained on issues including gender equality and equity, gender roles, leadership skills for role models, among others. This was

when Ocing started reflecting on his life, trying to search for meanings in the things he was doing. They did not make sense to him as he listened to the trainer. Previously, he would even cheat on his wives without any remorse because he didn't think of this as bad. But he realised how hurting this can be for a wife who loves her husband. He made a conscious decision to change his ways and slowly, he started acting on it. Presently, his wife is well-settled in because he respects her; does not quarrel with her, does not beat her and they chat as friends and make decisions about their children and their lives together.

Ocing who was trained by ACFODE to become a male role model has impacted on lives of many, both within and outside his family. He had sisters who were conflicting over land; one was married and the other was not. The one who was not married was the one in charge of the land at their parents' home and the married sister wanted some portion of the land so she could till but her sister refused arguing that she was not entitled to any of the land since she was married. It was Ocing who intervened, explained the rights that each one of them had and their entitlements. Although this did not take just a day or even a week, in the end, the sisters reached an agreement and peacefully split the land.

ON AVERAGE, OCING GETS A CHANCE A WEEK TO SPEAK TO PEOPLE IN A GATHERING ON THE ISSUES OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, THE NEED FOR COLLECTIVE DECISION MAKING FOR HUSBANDS AND WIVES IN HOMES, AMONG OTHER ISSUES.

On average, Ocing gets a chance a week to speak to people in a gathering on the issues of domestic violence, the need for collective decision making for husbands and wives in homes, among other issues. He is a counsellor at the sub county and he says that the training has helped him keep this position because he has the confidence of speaking to many people in gatherings. So when his first term ended, he was able to beat his opponent for a second term because the people already knew and trusted him.

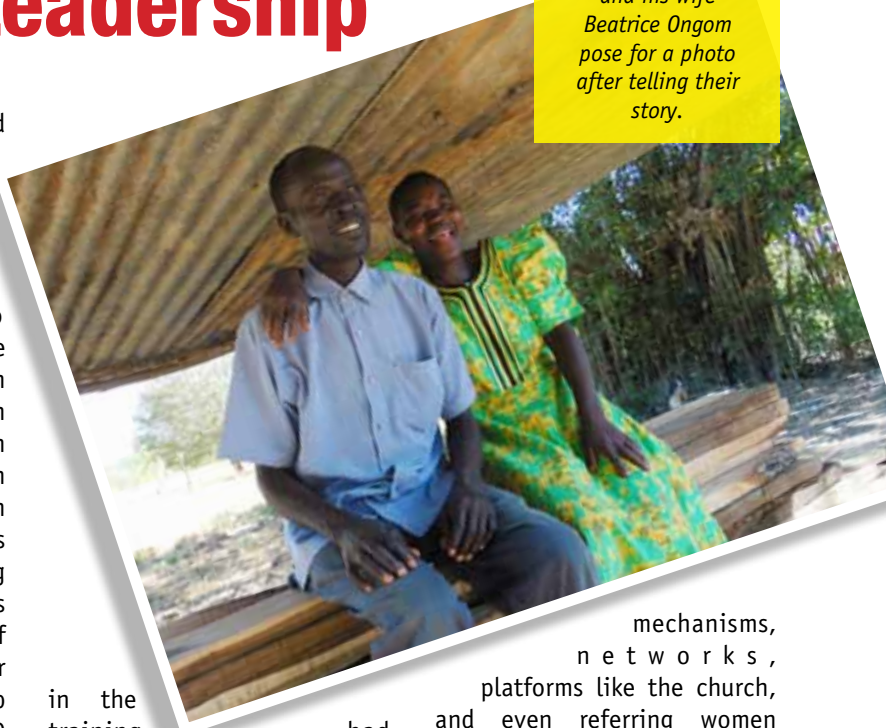
The forty six-year-old Ocing now has six children, two boys and four girls. His first born is in S.4 doing her exams.

In Support of Women Leadership

Mr. Ongom Patrick and his wife Beatrice Ongom pose for a photo after telling their story.

Ongom Patrick is 32 years old and is in a polygamous marriage. He found the excuse to marry a second wife after he had been elected councillor for people with disabilities at Akokoro Sub County sub – county. He narrates his journey with ACFODE, “My engagement with ACFODE started in 2012 when I worked for the organisation as a Youth leader. When ACFODE found me, I was already involved in training people living with disabilities in my village on issues of economic empowerment under the KetngwaloItic Group which I had founded in 2010 as a savings group. It had ACFODE trained on civic issues, enlightened us on the need to demand for service delivery and sensitised us on the need to mobilise and sensitise others to ensure they understood their rights and entitlements. So after this training, I integrated the new aspects of the training into our group’s activities.”

Patrick says that in 2014, ACFODE invited him to participate in training that would turn transform him into a role model. The training focused on areas of concern like equality for men and women, rights of women and men, and political participation for women. These were issues Patrick and others



in the training had never imagined were possible. But the training changed this whole thinking. Patrick started viewing women as people who were also able in their own right, to contribute to the development of their communities. When he returned from home, he spoke to one of the disabled women he had always interacted with. He could “see” her potential. He encouraged her to take on the position of female counsellor for the disabled at the sub county.

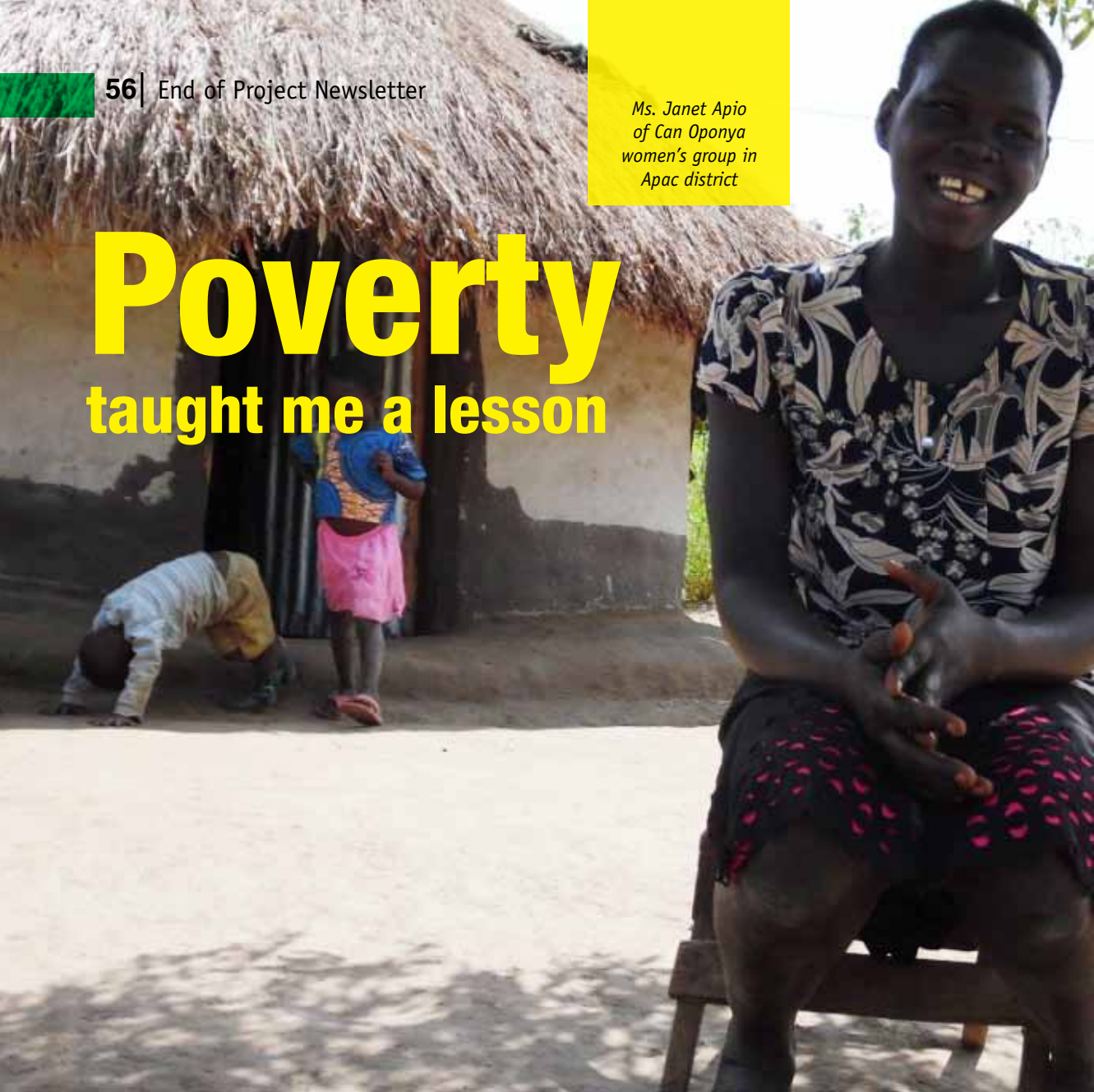
The training enlightened them on issues of land inheritance for women as well. They were “recruited” as ambassadors for women using different existing

mechanisms, networks, platforms like the church, and even referring women who have wrangles over land to such organisations as Land Equity Movement – Uganda.

He concludes his story, “At personal level, my wives are happier because the way I perceived women has changed. I make sure we plan together, when I have some money on me, I don’t just spend it although I am the one who makes it. I consult them and we prioritise together. I also ensure that I visit my young wife who is at the other home keeping our property; the land, the house, the ox-plough and other things at least six times a month and I support her financially.”

*Ms. Janet Apio
of Can Oponya
women's group in
Apac district*

Poverty taught me a lesson



My name is Janet Opio. I am 23 years old and a member of a savings group called Can Oponya (pronounced as KyanOponya) which means 'poverty taught me a lesson'. Can Oponya group was founded in 2014 by our current chairperson as a small savings group but now it has thirty members which is the maximum the group can take. The group attracted ACFODE's support in

2015 preceded by training in VSLA methodology in which some of the members of the group were lucky to participate before returning to train more members that had not got the opportunity.

The group, before the training, had so many things in balance because we were running it on rudimentary knowledge. It was

just the founder's motivation, coupled with our needs that sustained it. But we had no specialised knowledge or skills on how to run it smoothly. But after the training, we resolved on some things. One of the things we did after the training was to set the minimum savings for each person per week. We set it at one thousand shillings. This was to ensure that each

member kind of has a concrete saving plan but also enable us have a picture of what we could possibly take away from the group at the end of the year. Previously, our savings were not uniform as we had no standard guidelines.

Yes, so my friend, I joined this group at the beginning of 2015. I had a lot of need for it because my life was getting complicated. I got married in 2004 but I am now separated and living on my own. A few days into my marriage, I discovered that my husband was an alcoholic. A terribly bad one. My husband would drink and behave like he lived in the world alone. He would come home whenever he chose to and any time of the night. Sometimes he would not sleep home but the following day he gave no explanations of where he spent the night. He would come and swing past you like nothing has gone wrong. This was very annoying because on some of such days or nights, I would have needs but they would remain unfulfilled until he returned and I was lucky he had not spent all his money on alcohol. I endured this because I did not give him a child in the first one and a half years of our marriage even when he seemed to count each day that passed without a swollen womb.

When I gave him a child after two years, my hopes of having a better marriage with the coming of this baby were greyed. The man drunk as he usually did and

his situation even worsened. Unlike in the past when he would drink his alcohol and come home to sleep or sleep wherever he chose, my husband started getting quarrelsome and occasionally beating me for non-issues. Beating me for things like I have cooked food he does not want to eat that particular night, questioning his over drinking. The situation worsened by day. The man started behaving as though he was mad. Up to this moment, my suspicion is that it was because the baby I had was a girl. He had always wished for a boy child but I am not the one that decided we should have a baby girl instead of the boy he wanted. But I kept hoping that things would change. I remember each time I prayed, I would ask God to give us a baby boy for a second child.

One day, we developed a quarrel which I did not think was a serious one. It went on and on and when I realised it was deepening, making him as angry as an animal, I decided to keep quiet. He run inside (into the hut) and came out with a spear and before I could run for my dear life, he had pushed it into my left shoulder from the back. In so much pain, I shuffled to my in-laws and told them. I was bleeding profusely. My brother-in-law who works with Ruzira Prisons was there. He too was terrified by his brother's action. He immediately got my husband and took him to Mulago Hospital in Kampala to have his head

checked for sanity. We all knew he was insane. In the meantime, I got treatment and healed.

The doctors' report indicated that he was normal! I was shocked. It was unbelievable to think that a normal man I had mothered a child for could spear me. I feared so much that I decided to quit the marriage for my life. With a man like that, one could never have guarantee for their life. So I returned home with my son. Hmm, it has been a complicated life but I thank God for this group. My daughter is now four years and my son is twelve years old. The boy was not my husband's child so I chose to leave the girl with the father and I left with my son. I had conceived while I was still at school and his father had denied responsibility.

So I returned to our home with my son but life there was not easy either. It felt lonely, getting a livelihood was difficult; no soap, no salt, no money to work on my hair. Many times I needed emotional support, other times financial. I knew I was constraining my mother who had begun to eat into her meagre savings to ensure my son and I had the basic needs. The school term began and my son needed to go to school but I had not re-organised my life so he had to wait for some indefinite time. I decided to move around the village to my old friends and ask for any kind of help they could offer. The one who offered the

most help was the one who told me about Can Oponya Savings and Loans Group. This group has been my answered prayer!

I joined the group at the beginning of 2015 and started saving 2,000 (two thousand shillings) weekly and paying the 500 (five hundred shillings) for welfare. After I had been a member for some months, I borrowed 60,000 (sixty thousand shillings) and bought cabbage and tomatoes in bulk which I retailed both in the market and around the village. I kept reinvesting in the business and when my time for paying back the borrowed money came, I was able to pay back including the interest and also remain with some profit. I had paid all the borrowed money and now I had a debt-free business. By this time, I was able to send my boy to school again. I worked hard and started loving the business because it gave me hard cash all the time. I decided to expand this business by adding more varied items so I borrowed again. This time I borrowed 100,000 (one hundred thousand shillings) and bought a ten-litre jerrican of cooking oil and a box of salt. This increased my profit margin tremendously.

I had keen interest for keeping animals and so when my profit increased, I realised I could buy some piglets and feed them. So I bought two piglets but unfortunately, one died when I was beginning to expect it to give me wealth.



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But I did not make losses with it because I sold the pork and got my money out. Soon after, the other produced and I sold the piglets and bought a cow which I still have now. Pigs were becoming difficult to feed so I slaughtered the mother pig and sold the pork and with the money I got, I bought a goat. God has been faithful because it did not take long before that goat produced twins. My stock is big and I am sure it will keep growing! We have the customary land and it is big so the animals have enough grazing land! Both my mother

and son are supportive and they help in whatever I do. This has improved the quality of our lives. I am able to meet all my son's scholastic requirements and it makes me feel fulfilled. My brothers are also in the same compound although they are married. They do not mind me staying at home because they see how hard working I am. They respect and consult me on various things even though they are my big brothers.

This group inspired me to start a business and it has also helped me to stay focused. My next mission is to buy land of my own so that I am sure no matter what happens, I have my own land and I am not banking on customary land. This group has restored peace in my heart again. It has also given me the comfort, knowing that I am not struggling alone, in a sense that I have a support group but also, my exposure with the group has brought to my knowledge the suffering of many other women. We need to strive to get ourselves out of these pitiable situations.

Now, even if I think of getting married again, I do not prioritise it. I do not need to be supported by a man. And if a man came to propose to me now, it would be a man that respects my founded principals of business and my will to thrive. I cannot allow a man that wants to keep me in his armpit because of the several life choices I have now.



*Students of Akokoro
S. S. Apunyu
Andrew, Ayini
Moses, Kia Mercy
and their other
colleagues return
from sharing their
testimonies of
transformation with
the ACFODE team.*

We have INFLUENCE

Akokolo Secondary School in Apac district sits on more than three acres of land, typical of village schools in Uganda. The vegetation is all green. In some places it is short and barely above the ground while in others it is so tall it could compete with an eight or nine-year-old in height. There is silence and calm in the school because the Senior Four candidates are writing their final exams but also because there are not many students in the school.

The school which is in the neighbourhood of the former president of Uganda the Late Dr. Apolo Milton Obote was one of the chosen few schools where

the Action for Development School Club is. The School Club aims not only at helping the students appreciate the social norms that keep alive gender inequalities in society but also at equipping them with knowledge and skills to enable them to create strategies to challenge and change these norms, and in the long run do away with the inequalities completely. Practices like prioritising boy-child education over that of a girl-child, widow inheritance, exclusion of women from decision making processes, normalised domestic violence, among others, bring inequality.

Aini Moses, a Senior Two student

is the Chairperson of the club. Others are; Joshua, a Senior Three student and the club Secretary, Awori Immaculate Senior Two, Andrew A Senior Three and Mercy Okulu Senior 3 and the Vice Chairperson of the club.

"We all went to Apac town for the ACFODE mentoring retreat which happened in 2015. It was an experience we benefited from a lot," one of the students says.

When asked how they benefited from the retreat, the students say that they learnt many things from each other; they learnt from the poetry that was written and recited by their friends at a camp fire, the songs, and the proverbs. All these genres had messages related to what they were being taught; sharing of gender roles, girls' and women's ability to take on leadership, among others. The students networked a lot because the retreat brought together students from different schools.

This, they say was very vital because they formed friendships which they say were helpful.

"I know now if we needed our school to have a debate with another school, we know some students there whom we can influence to speak to the administrators on our behalf," one student says.

These students say that they decided to join the ACFODE Club because their predecessors had told them of the important things they were learning.

"Why for example should women be refused to eat chicken?" One of the students poses a question. They go ahead and explain the various inequalities which they want to change such as ensuring the girls are in school, girls continue to take on leadership positions and also take this message back to their communities to enhance women's participation in political leadership.

Chatting with the young men and women that are now the ambassadors of the club after the founding students completed their Ordinary level and left the school, one can clearly tell that they have grasped the gist of the issues that ACFODE seeks to address.

"You know, now with the awareness I have, even when I am at home and someone says something against a girl or a woman, I notice. This used

not to be the case. And if it is someone that I can speak to, I tell them it's wrong," one of the students explains.

Another student adds; "Boys in this school used not to sweep classrooms. We thought that this was a girls' role. But after we were trained, we understood these issues and now we have influenced other students in the school. We started with those in our classes and they got convinced and all the boys started to sweep. Then the practice spread to the entire school. Now, we all sweep. I sweep too and I now don't see anything wrong with it. I don't see the reason we were not sweeping before," one boy shares.

"Yes, that is true. We have sensitised all the students from all the classes and we are happy to see that for example boys sweep. Also, more girls in this school are taking on leadership roles that we initially thought were only for boys. This was because of our influence," another student.

Unlike students in other schools who did not get the chance to participate in the retreat, the students in this school have very big ambitions not only for their communities but for the country as a whole. They say that in addition to enabling them view issues in their community differently, the retreat also inspired them to study hard and become professionals.

One of them says, "I want to become a lawyer and participate in the processes of making laws that will enable women in this country inherit land".

Another says, "I want to study hard so that in future I work with ACFODE as a facilitator. When we went for the retreat, the ACFODE facilitators were great. They knew how to guide us at every stage, how to counsel us and I admired them".

'I am personally happy with the changes I have been able to bring about in our family but also in the community,' another girl says. 'When I shared with my parents and siblings about the unfair gender roles, somehow I managed to convince them, one at a time. It was one brother of mine who started to join me in the kitchen to cook with me and before long, he started cooking even without me. Now all my brothers know how to cook and they cook,' she adds. "Other people in my community especially those that are own friends are emulating us. We do most of the work together so when my brother is going to fetch water, his friends go along and they don't go empty-handed."

The students want to do a lot more and they believe that with adequate education, they will even have more influence because they will be more empowered!

Members of Pibox drama group act a play on domestic violence in the community.



Creating Sensitisation through **INTERACTIVE DRAMA**

Geoffrey Jenardo Opeto walks enthusiastically as he crosses the dusty marram road that leads towards his home where he has piled building materials. Godfrey wants to build a house for his two wives. His home is near the venue of the drama group which doubles as a VSLA. He is a member of the group too.

Geoffrey is one of the male role models that were trained by Action for Development. He previously worked as a community volunteer, sensitising people on gender based violence and domestic violence. He did this mostly through Pibox Group, a community based group he founded. He believes that ACFODE picked interest in him because he had already exhibited commitment to foster change in his community through his work. He only needed to be systematic and consistent which the training helped him to achieve.

The skills he acquired from the training made Geoffrey become a lot more confident in himself. In 2015, he wrote a proposal to Red Cross Initiative and got funding for the group to do drama advocating for girl child education. That is how the group got to be known by many community members, through the drama.

The group has staged drama shows on various themes in different communities. Some of the communities visited by this drama group include Amii, Tarogali, and Aketo Parishes. The group makes sure that their drama shows are interactive as the best way to encourage people to share views: so they will ask questions in between the scenes; Do any of these things happen in your community? Do you think there are members of this community who experience...? How do they deal with this problem? Suppose your wife did this what would you do?

As a male role model, Geoffrey took on the mantle of sensitising his community on issues of equality. He made women realise that they have leadership potential and in fact, one of the women he mentored closely finally agreed and stood for the position of Deputy Speaker at Ijuje Sub County. Immaculate Mino won and is now performing well according to Geoffrey's judgement. "There were all these cultural beliefs such as women can't lead men; women don't eat eggs and chicken. But these were devised to exert male supremacy."

As a result of the group's productivity and its fame, more and more people in the community want to join the group. However, this is not possible in the training; they were advised that it is easier to

manage the group if it is kept small, with a maximum of thirty members. Geoffrey has however helped those individuals to form their own group which is also both a drama group and a VSLA modelled against his original idea. He went ahead and trained them on the various aspects of leadership and group dynamics which he had been trained in by ACFODE and those which he knew from experience. "I have trained 22 members of a new group," he confirms. "I trained them on the principals of saving, record keeping. That is welfare, register book, saving ledger and forming leadership."

He has also integrated another component on the list of his training topics; he also highlights to the group members the importance of supporting Orphans and other vulnerable categories of children. For Geoffrey, if each member of the group saved 100 (one hundred shillings) each time they met, they would pull enough resources to help orphans in their community to buy scholastic materials such as books, pens, pencils and the like. This would keep many orphaned children in school.

Each member in Geoffrey's Group saves 10,000 (ten thousand shillings) per month. He borrowed money from the group and built himself a modern pit latrine, and he borrows money to invest in his merchandise business which helps him to pay his children's school fees.

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He now hopes that when they share the savings at the end of the year, he will have enough money to start on his house construction project, considering that he already has most of the materials needed at the initial stage of construction. Geoffrey wishes ACFODE could take the project to more people in other sub counties. "This project is almost unbelievable in the way it works. All these people are here because they are part of ACFODE. Otherwise they would be found in the bar, seated at the roadside playing cards or simply lying down and complaining about everything that is going wrong in our communities. We have all learnt that help will not come to us from the sky but from ourselves," Godfrey concludes.

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