

MESSAGE FROM THE AUTHOR

Dear friends,

I would like to welcome you to read this first edition of the ACORD Uganda West Nile News Letter, Issue 1.



This is an initiative of the team to popularize ACORD U work, share experience, best practices and stories from our day to day interactions with the communities we serve.

I want to thank the ACORD Yumbe team for embracing the idea and contributing the ideas and above all, the pictures, articles to make this a success.

Ideas to improve and bring this to another level are highly welcome. Enjoy as you read the amazing work from the team.

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West Nile News Letter

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ACORD Uganda presence in the West Nile region

Agency for Cooperation in Research and Development (**ACORD Uganda**) is a National Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) that has worked in Uganda since 1979 initially as an implementing arm of ACORD International. In 2019, ACORD Uganda was registered as an indigenous Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) with the National Bureau for NGOs in Uganda.

ACORD Uganda has Regional Offices located in Tororo (Eastern), Adjumani (West Nile), Gulu (Northern), Mbarara (South Western and Western) and the Head Office in Kampala which coordinates interventions in central Uganda.

With continued refugee influx in the West Nile region, **ACORD-U Yumbe Field office** came into existence, now with over 14 programme staff that have teamed up and are implementing over 4 projects covering Bidibidi, and Imvepi



West Nile ACORD-U team in a Group Photo

refugee settlements and hosting Districts of Yumbe and Terego respectively.

Key Projects;

- 1) Paradigm shift for Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights in emergencies (**SHIFT**); **funded by IRC**
- 2) Improving sustainable WASH services and Schools for South

Sudanese in Bidibidi Settlement; **funded by HEKS-EPER**

3) WASH services for COVID-19 Response in Refugees and Host Communities, **funded by HEKS-EPER**

4) Providing life-saving SRHR &

GBV services to respond to refugee influx and mitigate impact of COVID-19 resurgence – West Nile & Western Uganda; **funded by UNFPA**

Many thanks to our current donors for entrusting ACORD Uganda with funds to deliver on the promises as enshrined in the respective partnership agreements and ACORD U strategic Plan.

Yumbe District council decides on FP

Family planning remains a contentious issue among the populace both in the refugee community and nationals/host community. Deliberate efforts by the Government of Uganda and the development partners to increase uptake of Family Planning (FP) has been in many times hampered by the misconceptions and lack of enabling policy environment despite good programmes.

The statistics according to the August 2021 monthly sitrep report indicate that 24 young girls were impregnated in Bidibidi settlement camp. Similarly according to DHIS2, Yumbe District, a total of 3284

(720Refugges/2564Nationals) teenage pregnancies were registered between January – August 2021, demonstrating a significant gap in the access and uptake of reproductive health services among an already vulnerable commu-

nity.

This called for immediate action. Guided by the SHIFT SMART advocacy strategy, ACORD U engaged the Yumbe District policy makers with the objective to pass the resolution on FP that would have a significant impact on improving the lives of adolescent girls and teenage/young mothers both in the settlement and the host communities. The resolution is also in line with the launched Family Planning (FP) 2030 Uganda commitments which calls for greater inclusion of refugee communities into health plans and budgets.

Arising from such SRHR advocacy initiatives, **the Yumbe District Council passed a resolution requiring all the Departments/sectors and partners to mainstream FP-Costed Implementation Plan activ-**

ities into their plans.

This is a big milestone in championing and promoting uptake of SRHR services.



Yumbe District Council Speaker, Hon. Kassim ASIKU chairing the DC session hat passed the resolution on FP. © Justus

Many thanks to the District Council, DHO, the Health Committee and SHIFT partners for the spirit of partnership in the bid to strengthen the health systems in Yumbe District and the country at large.

Refugee Peer Mentor Mothers Spread the word to End Teenage Pregnancy -The case of Ms Florence HANNAH



Ms Mary Florence , one of the Adolescent Peer mentor mothers, the change Maker. © Pax

Ms Florence HANNAH, 20, who fled South Sudan with her parents way back in 2017 for her safety in Uganda during the insurgency in her home country, now lives in village I zone 3 Bidibidi refugee settlement, Yumbe District.

Like any other school going girl child, Florence went to Tara primary school in the camp where she completed her primary education however, after her P.L.E, she got pregnant at the age of 16 and her dreams to continue with school were cut short. Double tragedy hit when disagreement emerged between “ my boyfriend” and my parents that left me with no care and support.

“When I told my “boyfriend” about the pregnancy, he was willing to take the responsibility and marry me but my parents said I was still young for marriage and cannot get married. I have remained at home with my elder brother and the other siblings. Since my parents stopped

me from marrying the father of the boy, he does not give us any support, yet the child is with us.

I joined a savings group (SACCO) in my village and I use the small money I get from the group to add in my small business of selling sugar, daga fish and soap and I use the profit for my daily needs”. Said Florence with tears in her eyes.

Florence got to know about ACORD Uganda through Moses Aligo the VHT Coordinator for zone 3 when he was mobilizing for the training of the peer mentor mothers and she was identified as a potential member for village I where she comes from. After undergoing the training, Florence was able to learn about the consequences of teenage pregnancy and early marriage such as school dropout, labor and pregnancy complications, including infections.

As a change marker in her community, she led other teenage peer mentor mothers to

form a group to help them bring on board their friends with the same challenges to cascade skills and because of her leadership skills, she was elected the Chairperson of their group known as Zone 3 Peer Mentor Mothers Group.

“I am now preparing to go back to school by 2024 together with my little boy. Since by now there is no one to look after the baby as she is still young, I am teaching young girls never to get pregnant while still in school”.

She thanked ACORD-U/IRC for giving her and fellow peer mentor mothers an opportunity to learn and acquire knowledge to support fellow teenage mothers and the young girls so that they know the dangers and consequences of teenage marriages. She hopes the programme will continue to reach to more people in need of the support.

24 HWs from various Health facilities in Yumbe District serving both the refugees and host communities were trained on short and long term family planning methods to promote the best quality SRHR services to the people of concern.

ACORD Uganda strengthens Sexual and Reproductive Health (SRH) systems in Yumbe District; the district hosting the biggest refugee population in Africa.



A group of HWs whose skills in administering FP were enhanced. © Ambrose

ACORD Uganda, in consortium with IRC and WORUDET is implementing a project “**Shifting**

paradigms for SRHR in emergencies (SHIFT)”. ACORD U interventions are mainly implemented in Bidibidi refugee settlement, Yumbe District. Bidibidi settlement is the largest refugee hosting settlement in Africa with over 241,290 refugees, majority South Sudanese hosted in the 5 zones. The presence of this huge influx in the region has had far reaching impact including high pressure on the Health facilities that was already constrained.

ACORD Uganda, is more than delighted to work hand in hand with Yumbe District line department (DHO) to strengthen the health systems through capacity building of the health workers (HWs). A total of 24 HWs from various Health facilities in Yumbe District serving both the refugees and host communities were trained on short and long term family planning methods to promote the best quality SRHR services to the people of concern.

Celebrating key international days in style

ACORD (U) supported drama group performing on 16 Days of Activism final day celebrations, Bidibidi refugee settlement, Yumbe District 2021. © Pax



ACORD U embraces the spirit of partnership and working in common cause with key stakeholders to challenge the status quo inline with the ACORD U strategic objective 4. Celebrated international days have been yet another good platform for building and strengthening

relations as well as engaging the relevant stakeholders on issues that affect the larger population.

A case in a point is the **16 days of Activism** that ACORD U leveraged on to engage and send out key messages on the plight of teenage pregnant mothers that were not spared most especially during the lockdown period.

Using drama has been one of the effective avenues to pass key messages to the authorities. 12 drama group members were

facilitated to deliver the message and reached to over 300 people including the district authorities, UN agencies, development partners and Women, men, youth and the young from both the refugee community and the host community.

This year’s (2021) theme for the 6 Days of Activism theme was;

“Orange the World: End Violence Against Women Now!” .

Join us for the next **International Women’s day on 8th March 2022 !**

Transforming the lives of adolescent mothers in emergency situations:

The case of Mary KEMISA - Bidibidi settlement, Yumbe District



Ms Mary KEMISA, a 20 year old mother who lives in village 2 zone 4, Bidibidi refugee settlement fled her country South Sudan in 2017 together with her parents and crossed to Uganda during the insurgency in her home country. While in Uganda, Mary enrolled to primary school with hopes to further her education, unfortunately, she got pregnant in P7 moreover, 3rd term and dropped out of school at the age of 16.

The troubled Mary, shared the news with the

Ms Kemisa, a peer mentor champion. She teaches young girls to stay in school, abstain from sex and not to rush for marriage. © Pax

“boyfriend” who could not believe it and decided to run away and has since never appeared leaving her with only hopes in her mother. She narrates *“I have remained a single mother at our home taking care of my baby. My wish is to go back to school by 2023 though I have less hopes of where I will get school fees for myself and my child at the same time. Am still at home selling food items in the market, fetching water for people for money and providing hard labour for people as a means of earning my daily living”*.

Through the VHT Coordinator for zone 4, Mary was identified to benefit from the training of adolescent peer mentor mothers organized by ACORD Uganda who was later elected the secretary of zone 4 peer mentor mother group. She has this to say;

“The training has brought so many changes in our community, teenage girls are now aware about the dangers of teenage pregnancy and the teenage mothers are also going back to school and the people have seen the importance of family planning services. I can assure you that through our efforts, Esther TUMALU, a P.7 dropout almost committed suicide because of the pregnancy but due to life skills gained in the training, I encouraged her and has since gone back to school. I have gone ahead to sensitize teenage mothers with the help of their parents to go back to school and for the young girls to completely abstain from sex and not to rush for any marriage and stay in school”.

Mary thanked ACORD-U/IRC for the work well done and called upon ACORD-U to continue with the programme of supporting the teenage mothers and the young girls to live a meaningful life.

“The training has brought so many changes in our community, teenage girls are now aware about the dangers of teenage pregnancy and the teenage mothers are also going back to school and people have seen the importance of family planning services.”

Adolescent girls joined by boys, shining after gaining skills to make themselves re-usable sanitary pads

Like in many refugee settings, access to sanitary pads for adolescent girls and even young women remains a big challenge. Bidibidi refugee settlement alone has over 25,000 adolescent girls aged between 12-17yrs according to OPM demographic statistics as of 31st Sept. 2021. ACORD U with funding from HEKS-EPER, through a project *“Improving sustainable WASH services and Schools for*

South Sudanese in Bidibidi Settlement” deliberate efforts were put to address the menstrual hygiene needs for adolescent girls using the blue schools concept integrating the adolescent boys to break social stigma & cultural taboos. A total of 20 participants (12 males and 08 females) were trained to make the re-usable sanitary pads and they included Students, Health Teachers, School

Heads, School Senior Women and Government officials. Reaching to more adolescent girls and young women will enhance their life skills and promote girl child education.



Adolescent girls and boys showcasing their abilities to make re-usable sanitary pads. © Debie

Children by Choice, Not by Chance; A case of Kiden Jackline

Ms Kiden Jackline, a 27 year old mother of 4, is a South Sudanese refugee who came from Yeyi to Uganda in February 2017 fleeing from insurgencies back home. With her loving husband and children, the couple is staying together in Zone 2 village 13, Imvepi refugee settlement. The family largely survives on food rations provided by World Food Programme bearing the burden to provide the other basic needs to their children.

Despite feeling the weight to raise these children, the couple was so hesitant to take up any family planning option. Juliet narrates; *“We believed that once some-*

one takes family planning, the person can never give birth again”. ACORD-U/ UNFPA conducted an awareness session on family planning and this was a turning point for Juliet and the husband.

This she says *“Having attended the awareness, I and my husband went back to the ACORD Volunteer asked him more details after which, we appreciated the importance of family planning. Together with my husband in the company of a volunteer, we went to Imvepi HICII and I received an implant. At the moment, we are very happy and we plan to have another*

child after 5 years and if our financial status has not changed, then we wish to extend for more years before having another child. We are now acting as a role model couple to others”.

The couple is promising and showed commitment to encourage and educate other married couples and young girls to practice family planning to avoid unwanted pregnancies.



A Role Model couple for FP awareness creation in Imvepi refugee Settlement. © Immy

....together with my husband in the company of a volunteer, we went to Imvepi HICII and I received an implant.

ACORD-U contributes to Improvement of WASH Services in Bidibidi Settlement –Yumbe District



One of the Water Supply Systems constructed by ACORD U with HEKS-EPER financial support in Zone 4 Bidibidi refugee settlement, Yumbe District. © Romeo

In 2016, a section of South Sudanese refugees was received in Bidibidi settlement in Yumbe district- West Nile region after tribal civil wars in their country. By that time, access to safe drinking water often required arduous hours of walking to the nearest boreholes. Other refugees resorted to drinking dirty and stagnant surface water from river banks. So water trucking was order of day to rescue the high demand of water for hygienic and sanitary services. This was latterly substituted by drilling more boreholes because of the high costs that were associated with use of water trucks

In May, 2017, ACORD-U with funding support from HEKS-EPER came in to contribute to development of sustainable water supply systems to provide access to safe water and WASH infrastructure and services in Bidibidi refugee settlement by

construction of two hybrid water supply systems in Zone 4 and Zone 5. These systems are currently connected to 40 tap stands serving over 7692 people in both refugee settlement and hosting communities and this computes to 18 liters per person per day compared to desired sphere standard



Progressively, 30 institutional drainable Vented Improved Pit latrine blocks have been constructed in Schools and

health centres to improve access to



sanitation services

According to Yumbe District Development Plan for 2021 - 2025, all these outputs have translated into gradual outcomes that include increased rural water supply in Yumbe district from 42% in 2015 to 48% in 2019 and increased school enrolment rate from 57% in 2015 to 68% in 2019.

Improving institution handwashing as a tool to fight and control the spread of COVID-19 in Bidibidi Refugee settlement, Yumbe district



Young couple receiving hand-washing facilities in zone 5, Bidibidi Refugee settlement. © Rogers

ACORD-U with support from HEKS-EPER through its project WASH Services for COVID-19 Response in Bidibidi Refugees and Host Communities identified a total of 50 institutions in its supported villages of zone 4 and 5. The institutions included; churches, schools, Child Friendly Spaces, Early Child Development Centres, Food Distribution points, Health facilities,

community Centres, Women Centres to benefit in the distribution of hands free handwashing facilities. Prior to distribution, a total of 100 participants from the fifty identified institutions (2 per institution) were selected and trained on proper operation and management of the handwashing facilities to ensure constant usage and sustainability.

The beauty of conserving the environment in refugee settings

With the influx of South Sudanese refugees in Yumbe District (Bidibidi settlement) among others refugee hosting districts in Uganda, a lot of pressure on natural resources cannot go unnoticed. Both the refugees and nationals are in great need of wood for shelter construction, wood fuel for cooking among



Fruit trees growing promoted to improve nutrition and conserving the environment. © Rogers

others contributing to environmental degradation. Moreover, all this is done with less efforts to restore the environment. ACORD Uganda with support from HEKS-EPER in close collaboration with Yumbe District government, has put efforts to mainstream environmental protection activities and restore the degraded environment through promotion of agroforestry and rehabilitation of degraded rangeland habitats and watershed areas in the district. A total of 6,000 tree seedlings of different species (fodder, medicinal, firewood, and fruit trees and energy

saving sources) including Giant Lira, Gravelia, Maesopsis (musizi), Mvule, Melina, Calliandra, Grafted mangoes and Guavas where planted in seven schools and two community woodlots covering 11 acres of land. However, more resources are needed since a few partners particularly in Yumbe district have directed their efforts in this crucial area to save the environment amidst the continued pressure on the natural resources.



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“Working for Social Justice and Equality in Uganda”

Our Vision

A society in which all people are able to achieve their rights and fulfil their responsibilities.

Our Mission

We work in partnership with marginalised communities and those who have been denied their rights to analyse their situation and jointly find sustainable solutions to improve their wellbeing.

Our Values

- * Social justice
- * Excellence
- * Diversity
- * Respect
- * Equality
- * Integrity
- * Participation
- * Accountability



Self care at work place



Promoting wellness and self-care in the workplace leads to stronger morale, more productivity, less stress, and increased motivation, so why wouldn't you want to give your work life some self-love !

Challenge Star!



Miss if You MUST

Yumbe team Oyeeeee!

*We are looking for the **Winning selfcare idea!** Each staff will suggest at most one idea and voting the **Challenge STAR** will be on **25th March 2022.***

Good Luck !

Ending 2021 in style

The year 2021 was yet another vibrant year that ended in style. We saw the team growing with much vibe. Team building was central in cherishing and celebrating the staff efforts. The mini get-together brought the West Nile team in a new atmosphere creating opportunities to know each other and rapport for self reflection and teambuilding. Kudos to the organizing committee and the general team for the initiative. This should grow stronger for the years to come



Self care and team building activities closing 2021

The amazing West Nile Field Team

