

**"Strengthening
Institutions to
Promote Gender
Responsive
Social Cultures in
Apac & Dokolo
Districts in
Uganda"**

TRUE LIFE STORIES

Appreciation

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Foreword

"Strengthening Institutions to Promote Gender Responsive Social Cultures" is a project that Action For Development (ACFODE) has been implementing since January 2014. The project, which is being executed in Apac and Dokolo districts, seeks to strengthen the capacity of formal and informal institutions to establish and implement gender responsive socio cultural practices.

The project targets both rights holders such as women, men, girls and boys, as well as duty bearers (religious leaders, cultural leaders, local politicians, schools and law enforcement officers).

Featuring a cast of individual men, women, boys and girls; this publication brings you real life stories of some of the project beneficiaries whose lives have been changed for the best by this intervention.

The motivation of their stories comes from the sensitization and awareness on positive social cultural practices. From cultural leaders and husbands who have been empowered to support women's rights, to women who have been weaned off from negative traditional beliefs and practices, the story tellers share their experiences in an inspiring way!

It is our hope that you not only enjoy reading these stories, but be enthused to become an advocate of promoting gender responsive cultural practices in your local community.

Regina Bafaki
Executive Director
ACFODE

Inspired to Support Girl-Child Education

Like any other young girl, Brenda was very excited to see many people in her home in Awilla parish, Akokoro sub-county. Her mother had invited her women group members for their weekly meeting. And the meeting always came with a delicious feast in which the best chicken from their farm was cooked.

Brenda was dressed in a blue uniform and had just returned from school. Her face covered in sweat and her body weary, she dropped her bag inside her

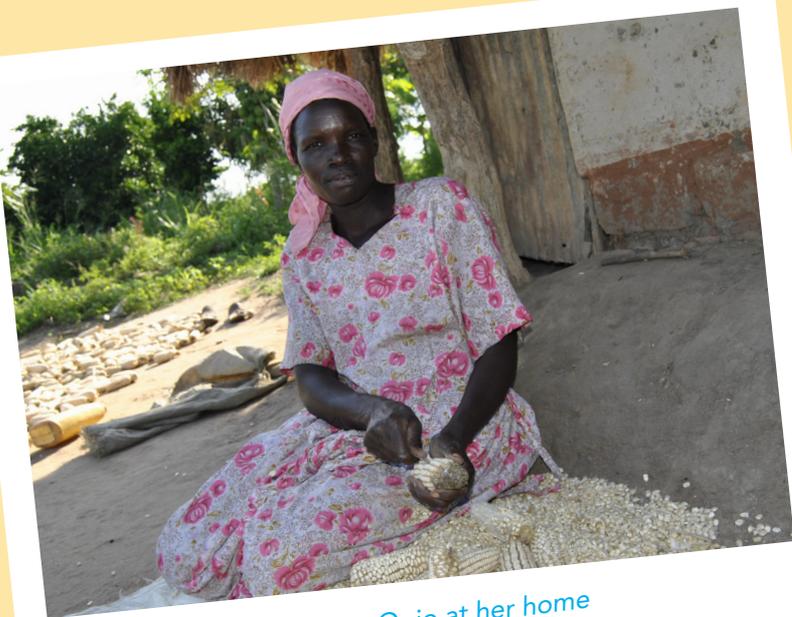
mum's hut. Before the meeting started, her mother asked her how the exams were and a jolly Brenda replied: 'They have been okay and we are finishing school next week.'

Little did Brenda know that her mother, Mrs Beatrice Opio, had never been accorded the same opportunity while still young. Instead she was married off by her father so that he could get bride price in the form of cows. She still remembers the day her husband came with her in-laws and a price was negotiated for her hand in marriage in her absence.

Mrs Beatrice Opio narrated: 'I did not go to school because my parents believed that in the Lango cultural tradition, the girl child is not supposed to go to school but only groomed to be a good housewife.'

As such, her parents married her off to her husband Patrick Opolo in 1974. They were blessed with nine children (seven daughters and two sons).

'In 2005 we also married off our first daughter at the age of 13years,' she adds, 'because we could not raise her school fees and also wanted to get bride wealth.'



Beatrice Opio at her home

During that time, girls would just elope with their suitors and that would be a big shame to the family and disappointment to the mother. When my first daughter got married, my husband and in-laws went into a week-long party frenzy, drinking alcohol and eating special dishes, so that by the time the party ended we had no money left from the bride wealth.

'Before we could settle down my other daughter ran away with a young man. We could not believe it since she was too young to run away. Even then, how could she face the other community members and the clan leaders without her young man paying bride price for her? As time went on we waited for her to return but to no avail. We searched almost everywhere for some months and finally gave up.

'All the time I wondered what had gone through her mind because she was just a small girl who couldn't make her own decisions. Then it hit me that maybe after witnessing her sister's marriage she had decided to shape her own destiny before we could choose a husband for her.

'The situation at home started deteriorating. My husband

started drinking too much. He wasted all the money from the sale of agricultural produce in the trading centres on concubines. We were all stuck at home. I felt like I wanted to end my life. The suffering was too much. The children and I at times went without food for days.

'But one evening in April 2013, I was listening to the radio on 90.6 Divine FM; it was then that the ACFODE programme started. The panellists included the District Inspector of Schools, the District Community Development Officer and the ACFODE Field Officer. They were talking about girl-child education and how educated girls can help their parents and inspire development in the whole community. The best was when they started talking about the socio-cultural practices in Apac. They were highlighting the negative and the positive aspects of the practices. They also talked about their effects in the community. When I heard about the existence of different social actors trained by ACFODE in the community I decided to invite them to my home. Luckily enough, there were some male role models in Awili parish. I invited them and my husband welcomed them to our home. They gave us some useful information and even went ahead

to invite us for their sensitisation meetings at church.

My husband was very excited about witnessing men talk about the different issues to do with culture, especially the clan leaders.

'In 2014 I was lucky to be invited for community meetings at the sub-county level. I discovered that there were very many community leaders, amongst them women who were freely expressing themselves on issues to do with the negative socio-cultural practices. After the meeting I joined them. Since then my husband and I have never been the same. He was enrolled as one of the male role models in Awili Parish.

'In May my daughters who had had dropped out of school and gone away from home returned. They said they had faced a lot of domestic violence in their homes, which had forced them to run away.

'As a result, we resolved to return both of our daughters to school, and they will be sitting the Primary Leaving Examination this year, 2014, in Awilla Primary School. With God's grace I know they will all go up to university.

'To achieve our dream my husband and I have started saving money got from selling our farm produce (groundnuts and cassava). Besides, we have joined the ACFODE members group in Idep village where we save 10,000/= every Sunday. All these are efforts to ensure that our children attain an education.

'I am so grateful for this intervention,' Beatrice concluded, 'because after the talk show we realised our mistake and negative attitudes towards girl-child education because that is the reason our own daughters suffered domestic violence. It was just because they were very young, illiterate and not exposed to their rights.'

The **Women Rights Movement** and the **Man Who Loves it!**

In 2013, ACFODE conducted a rapid assessment in Apac district of the existing different socio-cultural practices. The findings revealed that women were not allowed to inherit customary land and household property despite having a legal framework that promotes equal land ownership. The community members, especially the socio-cultural leaders, who are mostly men, were not informed about the existing laws. As for the women, they were the least informed about their rights.

Nonetheless, through the implementation of the project entitled Strengthening Institutions (Formal and Informal) to Promote Gender-Responsive Social Cultures in Apac and Dokolo districts, Mr Simon Peter Ongom was commissioned as a role model in 2013. As part of his induction he was sensitised to matters related to land and gender equality. He was also made to understand his roles and responsibilities as an opinion leader in the community.

'In my clan, Ogora, women are not entitled to inherit customary land and household property. It is the boys who are supposed to inherit property from their parents and they are also entitled to sell the property whenever the need arises,' Mr Ongom. 'This is because of the cultural belief that women are temporary family members in their fathers' houses and this ends when they get married. The community members think that instead of indirectly wasting money on another man's family through allowing girls to inherit some of the family property, they should ensure that the boys receive everything so as to maintain the family lineage.'

However, when Mr Ongom was chosen by the community leaders as one of the key influential people in the community to participate in the project, his attitude changed. He was the mediator in his village on all issues regarding customary land. He was the one in charge of all clan meetings held in the village and would judge and hand down sentences. He said that when he attended ACFODE community meetings at the sub-county level, he was at first not happy with the way the discussions were conducted. He could not believe that his fellow clan leaders from the other villages could dare characterise the practices that were dictated by their forefathers as bad.

'I sat quietly and in my heart I knew they were being deceived and made to accept different beliefs. I was shocked at how they even wanted women to participate in clan meetings and make decisions,' Mr Ongom commented.

However, after one of the meetings he approached the other clan leaders and the community development officers to find out why they wanted to change the customs. He was informed that the findings of the assessment showed that all the cultural practices in question had been in existence for ages. He was shocked because there were some practices he felt did not exist. He was also informed that the project did not intend to do away with the socio-cultural practices but sought to sensitise the communities and the leaders about those positive



Mr. Simon Peter Ongom

practices that needed to be promoted since they would lead to development in their communities.

He was told stories about how women had suffered owing to the negative socio-cultural practices and being left out of the decision-making processes.

He also was able to hear a testimony from one of the female participants who was evicted from her land with nine children and greatly suffered as a result. This was the time Mr Ongom realised that there was a problem. He then noticed that not all the decisions that were taken in his own clan council were always fair and also confessed that there was no woman in the council.

The following month he was already interested in the intervention and the issues that were being put across. He was inducted and commissioned by ACFODE as a male role model in 2013. He remarked, 'I was able to realise that denying women property ownership was not only a negative socio-cultural practice but also a violation of women's rights to own property.'

Since then, he has carried out a lot of sensitisation among his fellow clansmen in Apac district regarding the rights of women to own customary land and household property. His sensitisation sessions are conducted during the clan meetings organised in the various sub-counties in Apac and also through a programme on radio Apac 92.9 FM every Saturday from 8:00 am-9:00 am. The radio programme was allocated to the clan elders in Apac by the radio station. In March 2014, a meeting of all the chiefs of Ogora clan was convened in Ibuje sub-county and was chaired by the awitong (clan head). After a long discussion on women's land rights, the chiefs resolved that all the women should be allowed to own customary land.

As a result, women have started receiving a share of customary land from their fathers/brothers in the presence of clan leaders, who witness and also plant the boundary trees.

The policy of giving women land has increased production among women because they have started selling and negotiating prices of their farm produce and budget for it.

Living Happily Ever After

'For the 12 years I spent in marriage,' stated Mrs Lilly Ogwang, 'I had never had peace. My marriage was characterised by physical, emotional, psychological and economic violence inflicted on me by my husband and his clan in the name of disciplining me. I reported the matter to the authorities several times but they never paid attention to the case. I wanted to quit the marriage but I was scared of leaving my children to suffer at the hands of their irresponsible father.'

'One evening in the month of October 2013,' she continued, 'a group of men and women led by our chapel catechist, Mr Fredrick Okello, visited our home upon learning that I had been assaulted by my husband. They informed us that they had been trained by ACFODE advocate for women's rights and they therefore needed to resolve our situation. As such, they counselled us and informed my husband that wife beating is a crime and is punishable by law. They warned that if he continued with his ill behaviour, they would report him to the police. They asked him to take me to hospital since I was unwell.'

'As a result my husband,' she concluded, 'no longer batters me and peace has been restored in our home. We joined the ACFODE advocacy group and we are advocating the rights of women suffering from domestic violence. We have since stopped paying the local authorities to settle our problems and clearing medical bills resulting from the battering. We are in a position to save our money and pay our children's school fees, and we bought a goat for our family.'



Mrs. Lilly Ogwanga

Strengthening Networks for the Promotion of Women's Rights



Felix Arum in his office

As part of its strategies in advocacy and lobbying work on policy and legislation, ACFODE always encourages collaborations and networking with like-minded CSO actors at both national and local levels. In a bid to combat domestic violence, ACFODE collaborated with the local community-based organisation CADOVIC. The organisation, headed by Mr Arum Felix George Ojok, had been working to reduce the high domestic violence prevalence in the community through advocacy on radio, through guidance and counselling at their offices and through staging drama shows in the communities in Apac district.

However, there had been little success despite all the efforts made by the organisation. This Mr Arum had attributed to the patriarchal nature of Lango society. 'All the perpetrators were men and the avenues or the referral points for redress and justice were administered or headed by men,' commented Mr Arum.

He noted that the community members were willing to learn and change their ways but

setbacks were caused by the different existing socio-cultural practices. All the violence against women were perpetrated by men who are the leaders of socio-cultural institutions such as clans and religious bodies owing to cultural beliefs and influences that held men to be superior and required women to be submissive.

When Mr Arum participated in the project launch in 2013, he discovered that it was time for collaboration. He notes that the project interventions were unique and also timely for the region.

'I was able to realise that leaders of socio-cultural institutions like cultural leaders and religious leaders who have been in the lead to perpetrate violence against women were able to appreciate that there are some social cultural practices that infringe on women's rights like wife beating, forceful wife inheritance that need to be changed,' he marked.

His office and the ACFODE field office drafted a referral list with all the different stakeholders and the services they provide. They organised a meeting with other stakeholders to draw up

commitments in a bid to end violence against women and girls in the communities. The stakeholders also got a chance to be presented with the findings of the rapid assessment and the Domestic Violence Act. They noted that despite the fact that WACANE, another local based organisation, had started the process of urging the district to commit some funds to combating domestic violence, the referral points had to be strengthened.

As a result, there are improved linkages and networking among different stakeholders such as clans, religious institutions, schools and other actors working towards the realisation of women's rights.

Consequently, there is a reduced rate of domestic violence cases being reported to the police, according to the first quarter report.

'I greatly attribute this success to ACFODE because of empowering leaders of social cultural institutions and also using men as male role models to champion gender equality in the community,' observed Mr. Arum.

Women on the Rise in Leadership



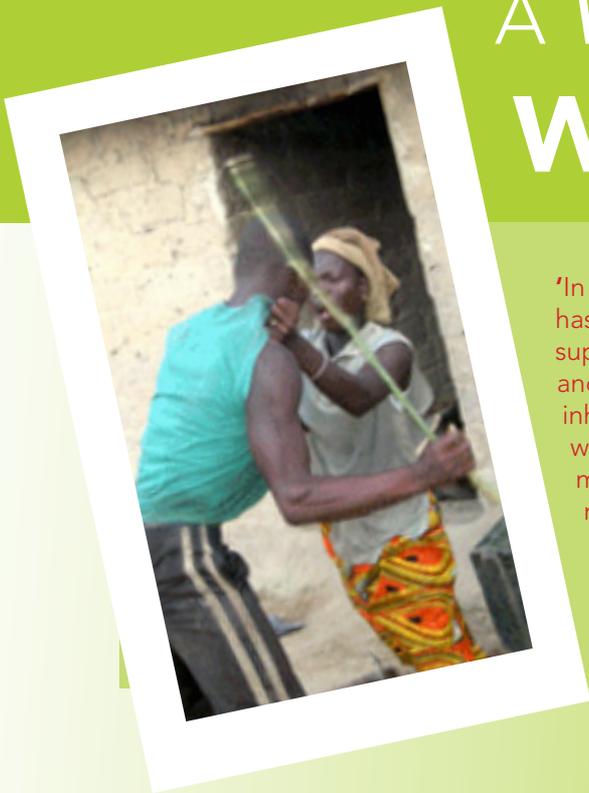
Mrs Molly Opio notes that in Lango, women were known for keeping behind doors. They were never allowed to take up leadership roles because they were deemed incompetent.

During a church service in September 2013, the area councillor, the Hon. Moses Odongo, informed the congregation that he was one of the male role models trained by ACFODE to champion women's rights and advocate for positive gender-responsive socio-cultural practices. He sensitised them about the equality that inherently exists between women and men

since they are both created in God's image, and also informed them that the Uganda constitution, too, guarantees equality between men and women.

He therefore encouraged women to take up leadership roles in church and in their communities. The Hon. Odongo's commitment to advocate for women's rights empowered Mrs Molly Opio. 'As a result, I contested as the chairperson PTA Idep Primary School against a man and I was voted. Surprisingly, most of the men voted for me and currently I get maximum support from my husband to successfully conduct my role,' she remarked.

A Widow's fight against Wife Inheritance



'In our culture when a woman has lost her husband she is not supposed to go back to her ancestral home but must be inherited by her in-law with or without her consent. But the moment I was trained as a male role model, I realised that the practice has been affecting women,' said Mr Charles Oluma.

'As such, I discussed the matter with my fellow clan elders during a meeting. We resolved, and documented this, that no woman should be forcefully inherited and that widows should be given the freedom to choose partners because the practice infringes on women's rights and is also a major cause of HIV/AIDS.'



Charles posing for a photo with his family

Confessions of a former Domestic ABUSER

actually that they were owned by men.

As one of the community leaders, Charles was chosen by his community leaders to attend a community meeting at the sub-county this. He said this was what completely changed his outlook. After the meeting, he resolved to stop abusing his wife and children.

As a result, peace reigns in his marital home. He plans to use his power as a member of the Parents Teachers' Association (PTA) in his district to talk to the head teachers and the community members about the existing socio-cultural issues and their negative effects.

Charles is 64 years old and a leader of Ocukuru clan. He is married with eight children. Charles was a very violent husband and also the NRM chairperson of his sub-county. He confessed that he was very violent towards his wife, and that he even married off his young daughter in exchange for

only a small piece of land. In June 2013 his daughter returned home crying; she was carrying all her luggage.

Charles said that he could not believe his daughter could cry in front of him like that. As far as he was concerned, that was alien to custom. He believed that women were private property,

Justice Served

Biito Ekwang a widow with eight children lost her husband two years back. She lost all her land and custody of her children to her in-laws. Clan Chief Ogora, a male role model in the community, explained that Biito has had a rough time since her husband passed in 2012. She has not been cultivating her land to grow food or take care of her children.

Biito narrates that she was happy with her husband and had a good life until death put an end to her lifestyle. 'My husband died in October 2012

and was buried in Aketo village where our home is located. After his death, life has never been easy for me and my children.' Biito and her husband were both hardworking and had lots of food in the granary. They used to live on her father-in-law's land that he had given to the husband.

Unfortunately, one day calamity struck and the list of tragedies became long. Her husband died and the father-in-law chased her off the land. She tried talking him into letting her stay with the eight children but he was determined to have



Biito Ekwang

them off his land.

Biito then asked for assistance from her relatives, authorities and in-laws, but all in vain. They could not help since the land was not hers. Biito found it difficult to survive without food and a garden. She hoped that at least the father-in-law would give her a small piece of land.

'He was going to reclaim the land that was left behind by my late husband on the grounds that he had given that land to my husband and that since he had died he had the right to reclaim his land,' Biito narrated. 'Besides, he pointed out that he had given me and my children six months to vacate his son's house.'

Biito got concerned and inquired more about the rightful owner

of the land. On confirming that the land actually belonged to her in-laws, she felt angry and frustrated. She was scared and terrified since both her parents were dead and she had nowhere to go with the eight children. She reported to the local police; however this step yielded no concrete results despite several family meetings and legal sermons to her in-laws.

However, in the process of seeking for help, Biito met the clan chief of Maruzi county who was also a male role model in their community. Her situation changed after she spoke to him in October 2013 during a clan meeting. During the meeting he was talking about the property rights of widows and she told him about the difficulties she was facing. Fortunately, all her

in-laws were at the meeting.

'After the meeting,' said Bitto, 'we were counselled together with my in-laws on the rights of women to inherit their husbands' property.'

Her father-in-law and his relatives later convened a meeting and discussed her fate in Chief Ogora's presence. They discovered that they were causing her grief yet she was part of their family and therefore apologised to her.

On a pleasant note, they returned her gardens. Community members have also stepped in to help and are currently supporting her with seeds to start planting her garden before the next season.

The Power of Women's Economic Empowerment



Lilian Amooli

'When one of the male role models by the name of Moses Odongo conducted a sensitisation meeting on the causes and dangers of domestic violence to our group called Poyo Wii Women Group, the members learnt that poverty is the major cause of domestic

violence,' narrated Amooli. 'In this regard, we decided that each member saves 2000/= on a weekly basis and engages in making tablecloths for sale.'

This greatly enhanced the group members' economic status. Today, most of the group

members are using the money to send their children to school. The group has, in addition, bought animals, including four goats and five pigs, as well as furniture to improve their standard of living.

The TAMING of the Shrew



Odur Nixson, with his wife and kids

Nickson Odur is a 37-year-old father of six children and a resident of Amilocell, Ibuje sub-county. He and Ms Helen Apio have been married for the last 12 years; however, he often beats her for not being submissive and in order to assert his authority as the family head. He is a fisherman who spends most of the time at the lake; and by the time returns home, he is drunk, violent and does not listen to his wife.

Odur's behaviour stems from the fact that women are referred to as property by their husbands. Women are expected to be submissive towards their husbands all the time irrespective of their bad behaviour. Being obedient is non-negotiable.

Odur is always at the lakeside, leaving his wife Helen Apio with the responsibility to look after the children and provide for their needs. He spends most of his earnings on alcohol and any requests she makes to him for money usually leads to fights.

His wife routinely reported him to the clan leaders but he was never given any serious punishment; most times he was simply fined with goats, chickens or money, which he picked from their marital home. This further frustrated his wife since she was losing household property to penalties. Despite the mistreatment, she never

divorced him for fear of having to pay back his bride wealth. During one of the fights, Odur broke Apio's bone and she bled severely. To make it worse, Odur abandoned his wife in her vulnerable condition, but she was fortunately later on saved by her neighbours.

However, one evening around September 2013, Odur was listening to the radio when he heard a radio talk show organised by ACFODE and a police officer from the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU). The radio panellist was discussing domestic violence and he noted that any kind of domestic violence was a violation of human rights and punishable by courts of law.

Therefore, they encouraged the local councillors and clan leaders to report any cases of domestic violence to the police. After the talk show Odur knew he was in danger of being reported to the police since all the clan leaders and local council leaders around the village knew about the maltreatment he subjected his wife to.

'As a result,' Odur stated, 'I pleaded with my wife to forgive me and I promised to never beat her again. She forgave me and since then, I have never laid a finger on my wife and I do not intend to do so ever again since it psychologically affects my children to see their mother crying.'

A struggle for My Inheritance & Property Rights

'I lost my husband in 2012,' said Akello Betty, 'but since then, my father-in-law has been threatening to kill me if my eight children and I do not vacate his land. He claims that he had given the land only to his late son. I reported the case to the clan leaders, the local council and the police but did not get help because all of them were interested in extorting money from me.'

'But my story changed when I reported him to our clan chief, Mr John Ocun,' she added, 'who said he was trained by ACFODE as a male role model. He told us that women also have a right to inherit land and other property; therefore I should not vacate the land and the house left behind by my husband. My father-in-law was strongly warned that if he continued disturbing me, he would face the law. As a result, I now live peacefully with my children without threats from my in-laws and am engaged in cultivating cassava to feed my children and meet their other needs.'





MARTIN EBU: *the Champion of Women Suffrage*

/ My name is Mr Martin Ebu; I am 58 years old and a resident of Teibuu cell, Akere parish, Apac sub-county. I work with Women and Child Advocacy Network (WACANE) as a programme coordinator and I am the chief of Adyegi clan.

'I participated in the ACFODE project of strengthening institutions, both formal and informal; and since I am a clan

leader, I was facilitated and commissioned as a male role model. As such, my capacity for lobbying and advocacy was built. I witnessed many cases of domestic violence in Apac district in 2013, yet perpetrators were not punished.

'In that regard, I mobilised like-minded NGOs like ACFODE, Campaign against Domestic Violence in the Community (CADOVIC) and Women and Child Advocacy (WACANE). These petitioned the magistrate's court in Apac during a District Coordinating Committee (DCC) meeting that was held in December 2013 to start implementing the Domestic Violence Act. The DCC meeting brought together all the CSOs, heads of departments, and the Resident District Commissioner, District Internal Security Officer,

the police and staff of the magistrate's court. The most common forms of violence reported according to the Child and Family Protection Unit (CFPU)-Apac included wife beating, property grabbing, defilement, bride price refund, family neglect, murder, land grabbing and heavy workload for women.

'As a result, the magistrate's court, in conjunction with the justice, law and order sector, facilitated the different stakeholders who are working on women's rights to sensitise the community. A sensitisation meeting on the Domestic Violence Act was conducted with all the LC 1 leaders on 23 December 2013 in all sub-county headquarters in Apac district with an intention to punish domestic violence perpetrators in 2014.

Can I STOP Being Abusive? Simon's Story

'In our culture, a woman is supposed to be submissive to her husband and should never complain about his behaviour or report him to the authorities in case of abuse. As such I used to sell my wife's farm produce without her consent. I would beat her or even threaten to send her packing in case she complained,' testified Mr Simon Okuku.

He noted that the situation had not been good at home because his family would go without meals and his children were not attending school since he spent all the money on drink.

His situation, however, changed upon attending a sensitisation meeting conducted by one of his

clan leaders, Mr Charles Oluma, who is an ACFODE male role model. His wife had reported him on the grounds that he was violating her rights. She had accused him of never allowing her to express herself and denying property ownership, as well as denying their children education and food.

'As a result, I stopped selling food items without seeking my wife's consent,' narrated Okuku Simon, 'and this has enabled us to save money to cater for our family needs. My family never goes without food and my children are enrolled in school. I am happy because peace has been restored in my family.'



It Took a **Village** to Save my **Marriage**

Little did Evelyn know that 13 January 2013 would be her last day to walk. The day had started more or less the same with her doing her chores. She and her husband had just received their third child, Amos Ekol, two months earlier.

Her husband had returned home drunk the previous night after a drinking spree in the trading centre. As usual, there had been some quarrelling but this time it was about money missing from the house. He was claiming that he had left 5000/= under the mattress in his hut but couldn't find it on return. He went ahead to claim that Evelyn was also not performing her roles as a wife in the home. He then woke up the children, threw all the bedding out of the hut and told the Evelyn to leave with her children. It was about ten pm in the night and Evelyn didn't have where to go together with her three children.

The nearest neighbours lived some distance away and no one

could come to her rescue. Evelyn decided to get back inside the hut and confront her husband. As she pushed the door she didn't know that he had a panga in his hand. All of a sudden he started cutting her. After the attack, he left her writhing in pain down on the floor, fighting for her life. Denis disappeared into the darkness. In the morning, as one of the neighbours dropped by Evelyn's home so they could go to the garden together, she found the children crying. That was when she spotted Evelyn laying in a pool of blood. The neighbour immediately called out for help.

While in hospital, Evelyn realised that both her feet had been cut off. She stayed in hospital for four months. On her return home Evelyn discovered that her husband had married another wife, who had three children. The only support Evelyn was getting came from her mother and sister.

But one day in June, while listening to the radio, Evelyn landed on ACFODE's radio talk

show. On the talk show domestic violence was being discussed. That was when Evelyn discovered that domestic violence was a crime and punishable by law. She reported her problems to the LC1 chairperson, who happened to be one of the trained male role models. The chairperson referred her to the police. The husband was arrested and charged with attempted murder. However, Evelyn knew she didn't have any kind of support to enable her to raise her three little children.

She returned to the LC1 chairperson for advice. That was when she joined the local women's group of trained ACFODE beneficiaries to get support.

In October 2013, Evelyn was reunited with her husband by ACFODE role models. She now lives happily since she has now reconciled with her husband. Her husband attends community sensitisation meetings conducted by the role models.

A photograph of Patrick Okwii, a man in a yellow shirt, working with a power tool in his workshop. The image is partially obscured by a large, semi-transparent yellow text box on the right side of the page.

How I dealt with an **ABUSIVE** brother in law

'I am Patrick Okwii, married with six children and a councilor for Akto parish. I am so grateful for ACFODE's intervention. I was commissioned as a male role model for ACFODE in 2013.

'My neighbour, who happens to be married to my sister, was always fighting his wife. The couple were not united, and our clan was not doing anything to help. To make matters worse, her inlaws always said my sister was very stubborn and a prostitute, not supportive and regarded her as an intruder in their family. She was denied the opportunity to express herself and to own property and land, and her children were taken away from her.

'In 2013 I was chosen by my community to act as a role model. I got to understand that everything that was done by my in-laws was a violation of my sister's rights. Also, I got to understand that I had a responsibility as a political local leader to protect women's and girl's rights.

'I contacted my clan leader in the sub-county and informed him about our rights and responsibility as gatekeepers in the community. He was deeply shocked about the revelations; finally he asked me to attend his next clan meeting. I used this as an opportunity to sensitise the community members to their rights and opportunities for the promotion of positive social cultural practices.

'My sister and in-laws were in attendance. They contacted me after the meeting and we scheduled a family meeting for the next day. We all accepted to meet to address the issues at hand. I am so glad that ACFODE empowered me and oriented me as a role model. Here at my workplace I am happy and people look up to me and I promise I will not let them down. My sister's marriage has also been restored.'

Patrick at his workshop



In rural Uganda girls are married off at such a tender age

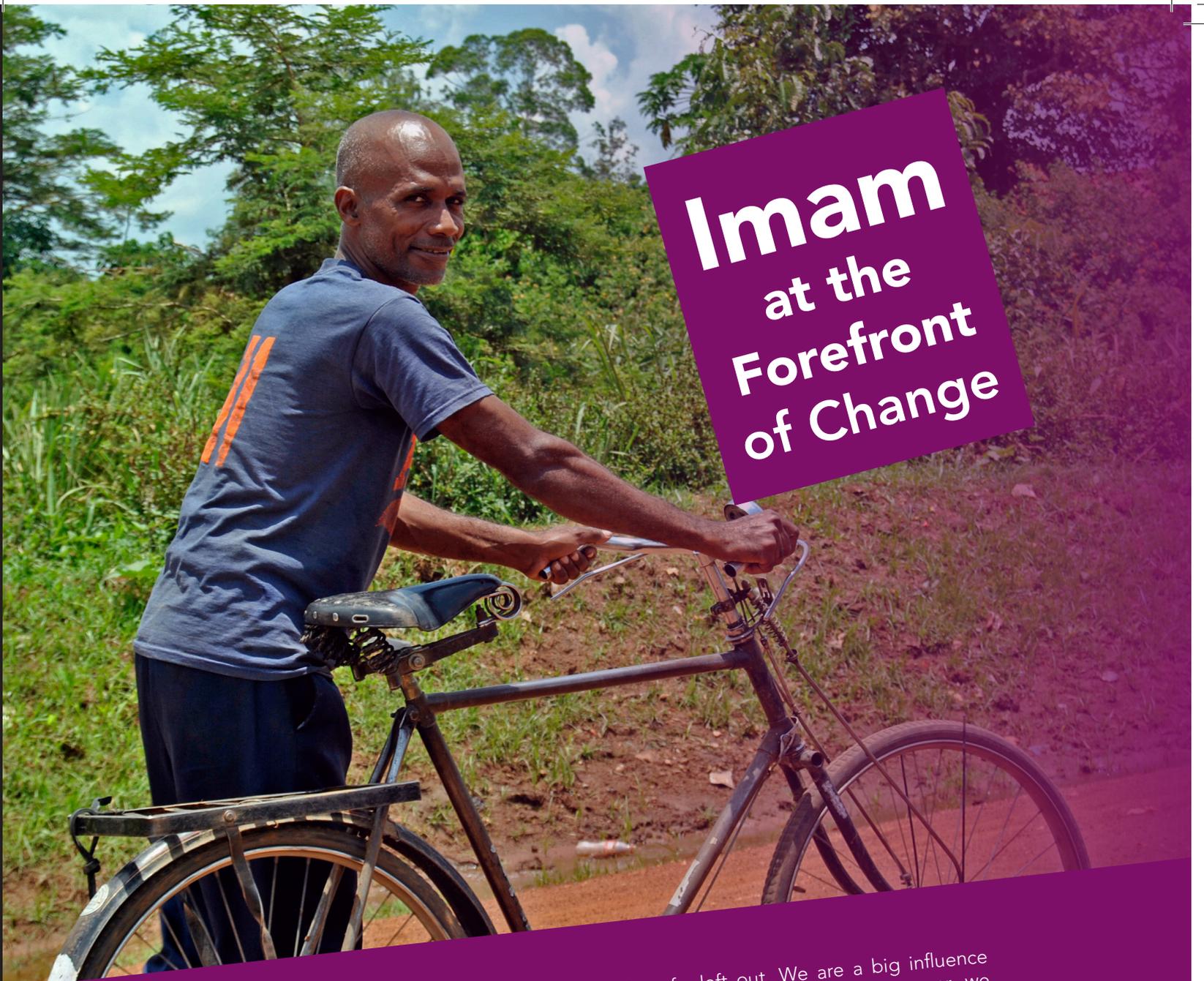
The Child Bride: Too Young to Wed

Betty Oneka is married with three children and two dependants. Betty and her husband never had the chance to go to school as they grew up. They had tried to marry off their eldest daughter, who was 11 years old then. Their would-be in-law was supposed to pay 100,000/= and two goats; he paid less than this and promised to clear the balance of the bride wealth later. However, before he could clear the balance he instead eloped with their daughter.

While listening to the radio in April 2013, Betty Oneka's daughter tuned into the ACFODE programme where they were disseminating results of the rapid assessment on the existing socio-cultural practices in Lango. Betty and her husband discovered that marrying off their child was a crime and punishable

by the existing laws.

Earlier on, however, Betty's husband had forbidden her from attending the community meetings organised by ACFODE. He had always thought she would be meeting other men. When Betty convinced him to attend one of the meetings himself, he was shocked to learn from the discussions taking place that he had denied his eldest daughter an opportunity to attend school. Both he and his wife contacted the Community Development Officer (CDO) at the sub-county and confessed what they had done. The CDO referred them to the police post, from where their daughter was tracked down in a neighbouring village and returned home. Betty and her husband are deeply grateful for ACFODE's contribution. They have since taken their daughter back to school.



Imam at the Forefront of Change

Yunus on his way to the Mosque

At the main mosque in Ibuje sub-county, one can fail to recognise that Friday is a day of worship. Only a few people trickle in for the day's prayers. In one corner of the mosque is Mr Yunus Saleh, the imam of the mosque. He has invited us to the mosque to join in the prayers.

Yunus is one of the male role models trained by ACFODE. In 2012 Yunus, being a staunch Muslim, did not believe that he had a role to play in the development of his community. He was chosen as one of the male role models on the basis of his being one of the religious leaders. He has created a male village saving group at his

mosque. He shares that a lot of domestic cases were brought to his office. Like many other Muslims, he did not accept that women had the right to make decisions. Together with other Muslim clerics he always thought that women were not decision-makers in the community.

'We thought that the Islamic tradition,' Yunus observed, 'concerned only us the men, and women had no say in it. In fact, we thought that Islam was more or less our religion, us the men. Many cases used to be brought to us, especially relating to domestic violence. They were mostly reported by women.'

'But I got to understand after the meeting that women were being

left out. We are a big influence in our community. However, we were not using our power well by undermining the womenfolk.

'We had been blinded by the negative attitudes – women can't eat this and can't participate in clan meetings. I really felt bad and that was when I knew I had a role to play in the community,' he continued.

'I have been holding a lot of community sensitisation meetings at the mosque and in my drama group. I used them as a platform to rewire people's attitudes, especially men's and mosques towards women. Thank you so much, ACFODE. These are very important interventions you are carrying out in Apac.'



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