

# CULTURE, GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT

“Strengthening Institutions to Promote  
Gender Responsive Social Cultures”

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PROJECT NEWSLETTER

December 2015



# Appreciation

This publication was made possible through the kind support of We Effect. ACFODE greatly appreciates this generous contribution.

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## Foreword

As ACFODE concludes the second year of implementation of the project “Strengthening Institutions to Promote Gender Responsive Social Cultures in Apac and Dokolo Districts in Uganda,” supported by We Effect we are delighted to share with you some of the project’s achievements.

Traditional cultural practices reflect the values and beliefs held by members of a community for periods often spanning generations. Every social grouping in the world has specific traditional cultural practices and beliefs, some of which are beneficial to all members, while others are harmful to specific groups, such as women.

Examples include early and forced marriages, virginity testing, widow rituals, female genital mutilation (FGM), practices such as ‘cleansing’ after male circumcision, and witch-hunting against women and girls.

Despite their harmful nature and the violation of national and international human rights instruments, such practices persist because they are not questioned or challenged and, therefore, take on an aura of morality in the eyes of those adhering and promoting them.

For women and girls whose personal safety and wellbeing is violated are at increased risk of long-life developmental challenges including other physical, emotional and social problems. These outcomes compromise national and international development goals.

Consequently, ACFODE has undertaken a number of activities that have contributed to the reduction of such norms that propagate gender inequality in Uganda. These were targeted at rights holders such as women, men, girls and boys and duty bearers such as religious leaders, cultural leaders, local politicians, school management committees, and law enforcement officers.

In this Newsletter, we pay tribute to women and men, as well as boys and girls who have participated in this project and willingly shared their experiences. We also appreciate the project team for their valuable contributions towards making this newsletter feasible

We hope you will be inspired by their stories to say NO to negative cultural practices and YES to positive ones for a peaceful and developed Uganda.



Regina Bafaki  
Executive Director



## School dropout prevention: Teacher inspires pupil to complete primary education

Name: Saida Ecii  
Name of school: Boke Primary School  
Parish: Aduni  
Sub-county: Ibuje

We arrived at Boke Primary School while the P7 candidates were just about to complete their final Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE). After waiting for almost 20 minutes, we finally met Saida, one of the P7 finalists. She appeared excited about having completed her PLE but her inner pain was revealed when she sat down to narrate her story to us.

'I had dropped out of school in July 2015 because my mother, who has raised us as a single mother, could no longer afford to buy me scholastic requirements for school. She also failed to raise money for me to register for my PLE. My home is far away from school and it became difficult for me to walk to school every day and leave late since I had to revise with my fellow classmates. All these circumstances frustrated me and forced me to drop out of school. I was then influenced to join bad peer groups of other boys and girls who had also dropped out of school.' Saida narrated this with tears rolling down her face.

Saida's turning point came when she was called upon by Teacher

Abibi Grace, a senior woman teacher at Boke Primary School. Grace was trained by ACFODE as a female role model and a representative of the girls in her school. 'When I heard and eventually witnessed that Saida had joined bad peer groups that are involved in drinking, going for discos and causing chaos in the community, I got so concerned. Saida was a very committed and disciplined girl at school, despite the financial challenges she was facing. She always dreamt of joining boarding school. I was forced to approach Saida's mother and have a discussion with her concerning Saida's future. Saida's mother informed me that she was still struggling to raise money for Saida to return to school, but at the same time she was disappointed that the only child she had hope in for education had joined bad peer groups. I then informed Saida's mother that I would talk to Saida, encourage her to return to school and thereafter speak to the school administration to allow her to continue with class as she looked for the money. I also pledged to provide support by buying Saida

some scholastic materials for her to resume school.'

With permission from Saida's mother, Teacher Grace followed Saida up, held several counselling sessions with her and was eventually able to convince her to return to school. Saida also accepted the sacrifice of having to walk long distances from home to attend school. Whenever Saida got caught up at school, Teacher Grace would host her at her house.

Grace committed to this to ensure that Saida finished her PLE. After Teacher Grace's narration of the story, we inquired from Saida how she felt about completing her PLE. This is what she said, 'I am very happy that I have finished my P.7. Few girls in our school complete P.7. I thank Teacher Grace for encouraging me and supporting me to resume school and complete my P.7. But I don't know where I'll go from here. I desire to continue to secondary school but my mother cannot afford to support me. I also wouldn't mind joining a vocational school; I believe God will help me.'



Name: Sarah Acao  
Village: Amuonyocao  
Parish: Amia Amilo  
Sub-county: Ibuje

## Survival story of life as a child bride

In Amuonyocao village, we caught up with Sarah Acao. We bumped into her while she was washing utensils in the compound, as her mother, Janet Okello, winnowed grains. We could see, through her body language, that Sarah had mixed feelings regarding whether to receive us or not. However, she eventually entered one of the small huts in the compound to get us stools to sit on. Sarah's mother was, on the other hand, very excited to host us. She immediately laid a mat on the ground and sat next to us to listen to the message we had brought to her homestead.

'I know ACFODE,' she exclaimed while pointing to the ACFODE label on the vehicle, 'You have done great work in our community.' After brief introductions, Janet began to narrate her daughter Sarah's story involving how she was forced into marriage at a very early age.

'My husband has two wives,' she started. 'However, he only supports the other woman and not me.

Recently, he refused to continue facilitating my four children at school. In July 2015, he forced my eldest daughter, Sarah Acao, who is also my firstborn, to get married. Sarah is only 15 years old and by the time she was married off, she had dropped out of school in P5. As a mother, I did not have peace knowing that my 15-year-old daughter was married to a man thrice her age. One day, I heard my neighbour talking about a youth leader in our parish, who is also a male role model trained by ACFODE to promote gender equality and prevent violence against women and girls. I requested my neighbour to introduce me to the youth leader as I was desperately looking for an influential, approachable and understanding person to help me rescue my daughter from the forced marriage. My neighbour introduced me to Otim Tomis, a youth leader of Youth at Work Group. Tomis visited me at my home and I narrated to him the whole story about how my daughter had been forcefully married off by my husband.'

Tomis proceeded to sensitise Jane with regard to early or forced marriage. He observed that early or forced marriage was a criminal offence punishable in the courts of law. He then agreed with Janet that the first step was to rescue Sarah from the marriage. Tomis organised a team of other male role models who, together with the LC1 chairperson of Amuonyocao village, approached the man Sarah had been married off to.

The man immediately released Sarah, for fear of being arrested or charged. Tomis is now in the process of sensitising Sarah's father to the importance of returning Sarah and her siblings to school. Tomis warned the father against marrying her off again at a tender age, lest he be prosecuted.

Sarah refused to open up to us about the experiences she went through in the marriage as she is still affected emotionally.



## How we support discordant couples to live happily together

Name: Denis Kayoi (clan leader)  
Village: Teibu  
Parish: Akere  
Sub-county: Apac

'I tested HIV-positive in 1990 while I was still serving as a soldier in Arua district. It took a while for me to break the news to my wife because I was scared of how she would feel and react. In 1992, I plucked up the courage to inform her about my status. I also encouraged her to take a test. She was so stigmatised and separated with me. We stayed apart until 1995 when she agreed to go for an HIV test. The result showed she was negative and the doctor advised us on how to live together as a discordant couple. As much as it was difficult for my wife to accept me back with my status, she eventually managed to cope. With time, we grew to love each other even more. Our doctor has been very supportive; he has continued to counsel us. We now have three children who are all HIV-negative. My wife is a farmer and is still negative.

'Given this background, my wife and I were chosen by ACFODE as a model couple to encourage other couples using our testimony since we are open about my status. Many

*'We don't focus on who is at fault. We try to show them how to proceed with their lives.'*

couples that find out they are HIV-positive suffer a lot of domestic violence in their homes, and this affects the children in the long run. We have been a role model to such couples in our community and have supported them to accept their status and live a positive and healthy life.

*'We don't focus on who is at fault. We try to show them how to proceed with their lives.'*

## A life changed, a second chance to live

Name: Erupadisa Aluzu  
Village: Barudong  
Sub-county: Apac



*'My battle to be alive today has not been easy, but the kindness and generosity of one of the role models in my community encouraged me to carry on. I therefore live every day knowing I was given a second chance at life by a perfect stranger called ACFODE.'*

Despite her old age (86) and being a mother of 18 children, Erupadisa Aluzu still looks strong and energetic. When we arrived at her home in Barudong village in Apac sub-county, Erupadisa was seated at the doorway of her house listening to a programme on her small radio. The lonely atmosphere at her home did not stop her from welcoming us with a broad smile as she reached out for stools from her unfinished house for us to sit on. Erupadisa's compound is covered by the graves of her 15 children who passed away.

On introducing ourselves and why we had visited her, Erupadisa narrated that she re-located from Gulu where she had lived with her husband and returned to Barudong, her mother's home in Apac district. She relocated because of the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) war that had affected Gulu district. As she proceeded with the story, Erupadisa pointed out the graves in her compound, explaining who the deceased were.

'These are my children and one grave belongs to my late elder sister. When I lost my elder sister, my nephew who is now 34 years old and other relatives started accusing me of being a witch. They accused me of hiding witchcraft in one of

the graves in my compound. At one time, they attempted to dig up the grave and take out the witchcraft.' Erupadisa testified that her life was transformed when she was introduced to a Catholic catechist in her community by the name of Luciano Okabo.

Luciano is a male role model who was trained by ACFODE to advocate gender-responsive socio-cultural practices that promote women and girls' rights. Luciano frequently visits Erupadisa, prays with her and encourages her. During our third visit in August 2015, Erupadisa was considering committing suicide because her nephew had persisted in accusing her of witchcraft. However, she never went ahead to take her

own life since Luciano counselled her and continued supporting her. Fortunately enough, Luciano was able to organise a family meeting between Erupadisa, her nephew and other relatives. He managed to get them to settle the matter and reconciled Erupadisa with her relatives.

Since the meeting, the accusations against Erupadisa have ceased. She now lives peacefully in her home and co-exists harmoniously with her relatives. 'I hope that before I die I'll travel to Kampala and visit the ACFODE offices, because brother Luciano tells me a lot about the good work ACFODE is doing to help communities in Apac district,' Erupadisa concluded excitedly.



Name: Cyrus Oguta  
Village: Teibu  
Parish: Akere  
Sub-county: Apac

## After the property wrangles that almost ruined his family came bliss

At Teibu village, we were welcomed by Cyrus Oguta and his elder brother. His home is about one kilometre from Apac town. In keeping with the tradition in northern Uganda, Cyrus' home is a conglomeration of several grass-thatched houses, which belong to five of his siblings. Cyrus and his brothers grew up as orphans. Since their parents died, their eldest

cousin who is an LC 1 chairperson has been taking care of them. Cyrus and his siblings did not get a chance to go to school so they live off farming. 'We cultivate the land near our home which we inherited from our father,' he narrated.

Cyrus and his siblings' family land neighbours that of their cousins. As a result, Cyrus and his cousins were recently involved in a land wrangle, in which the former accused the latter of encroaching on their land.

Denis Kayoi, a clan chief and male role model trained by ACFODE, is well-known for his commitment to empower youth economically through promoting projects like vegetable growing; he also intervenes in and settles cases of domestic violence.

Early this year, he was approached by Cyrus who went ahead and shared his grievances. Given Denis' influence as a clan leader, he summoned the two families, counselled them and also helped them divide the land equally.

Denis also advised them not to fight each other since they were from the same bloodline. Cyrus and his siblings have since lived peacefully with their cousins. They always refer to Denis in case of any family conflict. For example, Cyrus shared with us about how he and his wife approached Denis amidst a disagreement. He said, 'Just three weeks ago, I and my wife had a disagreement over her selling our farm produce without my consent. We called Denis and he helped us resolve the conflict amicably.'

## Girls in secondary school empowered to participate in leadership positions



*In 2014, ACFODE identified four secondary schools in Apac district, and inducted their teachers and students on negative socio-cultural practices. After the training, the students formed gender-based violence clubs, to advocate equal opportunities for both boys and girls in schools and against gender-based violence.*

*In the history of Chegere Secondary School in Apac district, girls had never taken up top and influential leadership positions such as those of head prefect, academic prefect and chairperson of the Uganda National Students Association (UNSA). These have always been perceived as positions for the bright students, who are taken to be the boys.*

*However, after the ACFODE training, sensitisation and awareness-raising on gender equality and the promotion of positive socio-cultural practices in the school and communities, girls gained the confidence to take up leadership positions, with the support of their teachers. Through the awareness-creation that ACFODE conducted on different socio-cultural practices, girls were able to realise that they have equal potential with boys to take up leadership positions.*

*In October 2014, Mercy Akello, a 16-year-old Senior Three student, contested the position of chairperson of UNSA against three boys and she emerged the winner.*

*Mercy attributed her success to the confidence created in her through the ACFODE project, which also changed the perception among students that girls were incapable of being good leaders. As a result, Mercy Akello has used her position to lobby for the construction of toilets for girls. As she remarked, 'ACFODE changed our perception of thinking that girls are incapable of being leaders. Through my leadership, I have lobbied for the construction of new toilets for girls since the old ones were almost filled up and more so they were located in an open space that made it very difficult for girls to ease themselves for fear of being seen by boys.'*

*Mercy Akello during the interview*

## Clan leaders support women's access to, ownership and control of customary land



'My name is Willy Cong; I am 56 years old, a clan leader in Apac town. In 2014, I was sensitised by ACFODE regarding the different socio-cultural practices in the Lango sub-region. Through the training I realised that women are not culturally allowed to inherit and own customary land. As a result many widows have been victims of land grabbing at the hands of their in-laws. My capacity was in addition built to promote gender-responsive socio-cultural practices in the communities.

'With the knowledge and skills acquired from the training I conducted a community awareness meeting on women's land rights, in Ibuje sub-county. As a result of the meeting, many widows who

had encountered the challenges of land grabbing were prompted to report their cases to me. During the training we were taught about the different actors working on women's land rights in Apac, so I referred the women to the Uganda Land Alliance and 23 of them have received certificates of customary land ownership. The women have also testified that they are now cultivating their land without fear of it being grabbed.

'I attribute this success to ACFODE training that built my capacity to promote gender-responsive socio-cultural practices in the communities.'

*Mr Willy Cong*

## Educating the masses through radio talk shows



'I lost my husband in August 2011. After his death, my in-laws chased me and my five children out of the house claiming I was responsible for their son's death. I reported my case to the clan leaders and chairperson LCI of our village but I did not get any help. This left me very frustrated. One evening I tuned into Radio Divine (90.6 FM) and listened to an ACFODE programme with discussions on the rights of widows to inherit and own property from their late husbands. The panellists on the talk show included the ACFODE field officer, the Community Liaison Officer (CLO)- Apac Central Police Station, the Gender Focal Officer and 1 cultural leader. The talk show inspired me to report my case to the Police CLO, Mr Domonic Otieno. The CLO summoned my in-laws who, after several discussions, apologised to me and accepted to return my late husband's land and house. I and my children are now happy and fully utilising the land for cultivation.'

*Ms Mary Apio, who reclaimed her late husband's house and land.*



## I am an inspiration to the girl-child in my community

Name: Janet Christine Nyaga  
Sub-county: Kangai

As a senior woman teacher at Angai Primary School and a stakeholder in the ACFODE project, I am a witness to the benefits of this project. Angai Primary School participated in the mentoring camp for primary pupil leaders and teachers, which was organised by ACFODE in June 2015, in Lira district. The four pupils who were selected from my school were so excited to participate in the camp. For most of them, it was their first time to travel outside Dokolo district, and when they arrived at the hotel where we were residing, they couldn't imagine the luxury they had been exposed to. Some of them were seeing, for the first time, a TV, plenty of running water and the rest of the hotel facilities that they described as simply amazing.

After the mentoring camp, we implemented our plan of action by forming accountability groups. Each of the four pupils who attended the camp formed an accountability group that comprises 15 pupils from different classes. With my support and the support of the senior male teacher, the groups meet every Wednesday after class. They discuss issues concerning their rights as children and the abuses they experience – such as forced and early marriages, sexual abuse, among others.

As a result, the pupils have been encouraged to report the challenges affecting them both at school and at home. They know where to report and who to report to. Since the groups are also a platform where the pupils open up and encourage each other, this has improved their school attendance and performance.

During the mentoring camp, teachers were taught how to become role models to their students. Accordingly, after the camp I encouraged my fellow teachers to develop learning techniques meant to improve our pupils' performance. I am glad to report that they are in place now. Examples include charts and practical sessions where real objects are used. This has helped to simplify and improve learning for my pupils, mostly in Primary Four and Seven.

I have also lobbied for a guidance-and-counselling room where I meet girls who have challenges and need help. When buying school items, I lobbied for a budget for 'girl welfare'. This money is used to buy soap and basins to help girls during their menstruation, to prevent dropout. I have also begun pad-making sessions with the girls, during which I teach them to make homemade sanitary pads using affordable materials. Gladly, the school administration allocated Friday afternoons for these sessions.

*All these initiatives have greatly uplifted Angai Primary School and we have ACFODE to thank.*

## I broke the bias against female clan leaders



Name: Jamila Eton  
Sub-county: Bata

'My husband was arrested in January 1977; during his arrest I had a two-month-old baby. I asked my relatives to help me fight for my husband's release but they refused, so I did the fighting alone and my husband was released. Since then, I have said no to male intimidation.'

Jamila Eton, a female clan leader of Etongoro me Okwero Kic clan in Bata sub-county, Dokolo district, narrates her experience in wiping away negative socio-cultural practices that violate women's rights in her clan.

'I am a victim of tweyo lao, a practice in the Lango tradition

where newly married women are required to walk naked before the male clan members and in-laws, as a way of initiating them into their husbands' clan. This practice is so shameful and intimidating. I support culture, which is my identity, but not the negative socio-cultural practices. Before I joined the ACFODE project, I was already a clan leader but in a very low position. Despite my position and the fact that I was the only female clan leader among so many men, I individually advocated against the negative socio-cultural practices. Little did I know that there was an NGO shouting louder than I was. Under the umbrella of ACFODE I have been empowered to be more aggressive in wiping away negative cultural practices from my clan. I now speak with confidence and I freely open up on issues during clan meetings. I pursue women's issues until they are agreed upon by other clan leaders. As a result of ACFODE empowering me through the project, I have been promoted from the lowest clan leadership position to almost the highest; I am also a treasurer in the office of the Rwot – our King.

Because of ACFODE training, I have strongly advocated against the tweyo lao practice. My husband is very supportive of what I do for women in my clan and both I and my husband are role models. We are also a model couple that encourages families to accept change in culture. I call myself 'an ambassador against bad culture'. If FGM advocates could succeed with their advocacy, then I will also succeed. I will fight on against all bad socio-cultural practices that violate women. Thank you ACFODE for inspiring and strengthening me.'

## ACFODE helped me to reclaim what belonged to me

Dorcus Apio, 65 years old, is a widow with 12 children. She lost her husband in 2011. After the death of her husband, all the large chunks of land she thought belonged to her and her children were grabbed. According to the village chief of Along clan and a male role model in the community, Mr Tom Egor, Dorcus Apio has had a very difficult time since the death of her husband in 2011. She has not been cultivating her land to grow food or take care of her children.

In tears, Dorcus narrates that she was married to her late husband in 1978 and they were living happily until death snatched away her husband. 'My husband died in April 2011 and was buried in Ongica village, Chegere sub-county where our home is located. After his death, life has never been easy for me and my children. Before his death we used to work together and had lots of food in the granary to feed our family.'

Dorcus, her late husband, together with their 12 children used to live on the customary land that was given to the husband by his parents.

One unforgettable day, when Dorcus was still mourning her beloved husband, another disaster struck. She was told to leave the land immediately because she was accused of being a witch. Besides, the person who was given the land was dead. Four of Dorcus' in-laws chased her off the land. She pleaded with them to let her stay so that she could look after her 12 children but her pleas fell on deaf ears.

Dorcus then reported her case to relatives, local council leaders, clan leaders and in-laws but she was not helped. They could not help her since the land was not hers and what complicated the matter was that in the

Lango tradition women cannot inherit customary land. Dorcus became very desperate because, with a large family and with no land where she could grow food, life became very difficult for her.

Without an option, Dorcus decided to return to her late father's land with her 12 children so that she could cultivate the land and feed her children. However, her brothers also rejected her, claiming there is no land for her. However, while in total confusion and lacking help, Dorcus met one of the widows by the name of Grace Akello, who directed her to Tom Egor, the male role model in their community. Grace first got in touch with Tom because she had also had a similar problem and she had been helped by Tom. Thereafter, Tom, also in his capacity as the village chief of Along clan, summoned both parties for the meeting to settle the matter but unfortunately the meeting did not yield any good result. Tom did not give up; he referred the case to the Community Liaison Officer (CLO), Apac Central Police Station, Sgt. Tom Patrick Ogwang. Patrick was also trained as a male role model by ACFODE. The CLO and other clan leaders held a joint meeting and the land dispute between Dorcus and her in-laws was discussed and resolved. The CLO used the opportunity to sensitise Apio's in-laws and the clan leaders to the rights of widows to inherit and own customary land which is stipulated in the Land Act of 1998 and the 1995 Constitution.

'My in-laws realised their mistakes and also learnt that there was nowhere I could go with my 12 children. They apologised and allowed me to start cultivating the land so that I could feed my children who are their children too. I'm now happy again because last season, I managed to harvest four sacks of beans, six sacks of groundnuts and four sacks of maize which I'm using to sustain my family.'

# A male role model at the forefront of girl-child education

Akodo, a teacher at Ilee Primary School and a male role model trained by ACFODE, proudly narrates how he has made a positive change in the school in favour of girls.

'During my first weeks in Ilee Primary School, I realised that during class hours girls sat separately from boys, girls' participation in class was very minimal, out of fourteen school prefects, nine were boys and only five were girls in lower positions, and the work of smearing classes with cow dung and general cleaning was left to girls. Furthermore, some teachers were assigning school girls roles of fetching water for their homes, collecting firewood, washing utensils and babysitting the children of the female teachers during class hours. There was also the concern of reported cases of sexual harassment of school girls by some male teachers.'

During a staff meeting at the beginning of Term II, 2015, Adoko plucked up the courage to raise the issues before the head teacher and the teaching staff. He expressed concern that such practices contributed to high school dropout among girls, as well as poor performance. His colleagues disagreed with him, claiming that the girls were grown-up and should carry out household chores to train them to become better wives in future. 'I expressed my disappointment to them,' he continued, 'and informed them of my role as a male role model in advocating gender-responsive socio-cultural practices in the school, as trained by ACFODE and endorsed by the district head offices of Apac. I also informed

them that such acts that violate the rights of girls to accomplish their education are punishable by law and will be reported to the office of the Inspector of Schools for further investigation.

'On realising how disappointed I was and that I was serious about reporting the matter to higher authorities, the head teacher passed a policy against such negative practices. He declared that the staff quarters were out of bound to all pupils and assigned me the role of sensitising the pupils and teachers to the need to eliminate all negative socio-cultural practices in the school, such as discriminatory seating arrangements in class, discrimination against girls who wish to take up leadership positions, participation of girls in class, sharing gender roles and assigning girls to perform household chores at teachers' homes.

'As a result, boys have started sharing desks and academic group discussions with girls. This has triggered competition between boys and girls. The positions of head boy and head girl were scrapped and were replaced with the position of head prefect which can now be contested by both boys and girl. Gender roles like smearing the classrooms and general cleaning are now shared among boys and girls. I give all the credit to ACFODE, who empowered me as an advocate for equal opportunities for both boys and girls and to eliminate all forms of negative socio-cultural practices in Ilee Primary School.'

## How joint financial planning has improved the standard of living in my family



'My name is John Awita from Alela village in Akuru, Lango parish, Kangai sub-county, in Dokolo district. I am married with five children. I got to know ACFODE on August 2014 when I was invited to train at Dokolo district headquarters. The invitation excited me because I had never been invited to any workshop together with my wife. The workshop was so powerful because couples from the two sub-counties (Bata and Kangai) were involved.

'The training empowered us on how to promote positive socio-cultural practices and prevent gender-based violence. Topics such as sharing gender roles, planning and developing a family work plan were discussed. Immediately after



*John and Harriet Awita pose for a photo with their bull (left) and garden (right)*

the training, I discussed with my wife and we developed a budget for our home. This was something we had never thought about before; I always assumed that my wife had no idea how to contribute towards the family progress, but only to take care of the children. However, when I began involving my wife and loving her, I realised that she was an intelligent and encouraging person.

‘Most importantly, we began to save money together, from the small business we have. By March 2015, we had saved up to 700,000 shillings. My wife advised me to buy a bull with this money to improve our farming and production of high quality yields, in order to earn us more money, with which we plan on constructing a house.

‘Special thanks to ACFODE for such a brilliant idea of training couples as a way of reducing gender-based violence in a home. I actually did not know I would live to love my wife and plan with her. We are now very happy.’

## A dream come true: The first time I tasted chicken

In the Lango tradition, women and girls were not allowed to eat certain types of food such as eggs, milk, meat and chicken, despite the fact that the women prepared the food and served it to their husbands.

‘The first 27 years I spent in marriage,’ Grace narrated, ‘I had never eaten chicken; and since my husband was a village clan chief, he was very strict on following the traditional cultural norms, with claims that if he went against them his ancestors would get so angry with him. I would therefore cook chicken and serve the whole of it to my husband, who shared it with our three sons. As time went on, my six daughters became increasingly uncomfortable with the practice and each time they talked to their father about it, he responded to them that they can’t change tradition.

‘One evening, we tuned into Radio Divine and listened to an ACFODE programme in which the panellists were discussing the eradication of the negative socio-cultural practices that violate the rights of women and girls. Among them was the practice of denying women and girls the right to eat certain foods, for example chicken. The panellists on the talk show consisted of the ACFODE Field Officer, Moses Otwang, a police officer and a clan leader.’

After listening to the talk show, Grace and her daughters gained the courage to re-engage Patrick, Grace’s husband, about the issue of eating chicken. His response was still negative. Fortunately, Patrick was invited by ACFODE to participate in the community meeting with leaders of socio-cultural institutions, in Akokoro sub-county headquarters. The meeting aimed at discussing how to eradicate negative socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women and girls.

Patrick narrates that during the meeting, ‘I was shocked to hear my fellow clansmen speaking against denying women the right to certain foods, including chicken. I bitterly confronted them about their intention to change the Lango tradition. Their response to me was that such tradition was outdated and violates the rights of women and girls and so needs to change. I felt so challenged and ashamed. That same evening, I returned

home and requested my wife to slaughter and prepare the fattest chicken, which we ate together as a family.’

*‘One evening, we tuned into Radio Divine and listened to an ACFODE programme in which the panellists were discussing the eradication of the negative socio-cultural practices that violate the rights of women and girls. Among them was the practice of denying women and girls the right to eat certain foods, for example chicken. The panellists on the talk show consisted of the ACFODE Field Officer, Moses Otwang, a police officer and a clan leader.’*

‘That night was the best night for me and my daughters. Tasting chicken the very first time in our lives was a dream come true for us. I thank ACFODE for changing my husband; he was so rigidly set against change,’ Grace testified with excitement.

## A drama show that saved my marriage from domestic violence

Lillian Ogwang is 42 years old and is married to Jacob Ogwang. They have seven children. Lillian's marriage has, however, been characterised by physical and emotional violence inflicted on her by her husband as a way of disciplining her. In February 2015, Lillian's story changed.

'I have been married the past 23 years, but all these years in my marriage, I have experienced both physical and emotional violence from my husband. To him I became a punching bag that he would relieve stress on. Two days would hardly pass by without my husband pouncing at me. When I attempted to officially divorce him, my husband threatened to demand a refund of my bride price. Knowing very well that my parents were dead and my poor family could not afford the refund, I was forced to remain in the marriage. But as the Bible says, "Ask and it will be given to you." I kept asking God for peace in our home and at the beginning of February 2015, God responded to my prayer. In February 2015 at Awila trading centre, Idep Women Drama Group conducted a drama show on the dangers of wife beating. Coincidentally, my husband was at the same trading centre drinking, so he watched the drama presentation.'

Jacob, Lillian's husband, was humbled by the drama show; it made him realise that what the actors were presenting on wife beating was what he was exactly doing to his wife. Besides, the drama show clearly sensitised the community to where cases of domestic violence should be reported. After the drama

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Lillian narrated, 'I cannot forget the day of 6 February 2015, when my husband woke up in the morning and asked me to prepare food since he was expecting some visitors. At around 3pm, I was shocked to receive a team of four women and two men who later introduced

themselves as ACFODE drama group members.'

Immediately afterwards, Jacob began narrating how he had been humbled by the drama show and confessed that for a long time he had been battering his wife, which he thought was normal, and that little did he know that wife beating was criminal and punishable by law. On hearing her husband make such a confession, Lillian narrates, tears of joy and relief rolled down her face. She could not believe what she was hearing her husband confess before the drama group members. Jacob there and then apologised to Lillian and promised never to beat her again.

The drama group members thanked Jacob for realising his mistake and counselled the couple on the dangers of domestic violence. Lillian and Jacob were thereafter inspired to join the drama group where they became a model couple and now sensitise communities to the dangers of negative socio-cultural practices, including wife beating. In addition, Lillian's self-esteem was boosted and, with support from her drama group members, she has taken up a leadership position as chairperson of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) of Idep Primary School. Lillian was also elected a clan leader. Lillian has used her position as PTA chairperson to sensitise parents, teachers and pupils against negative socio-cultural practices like early and forceful marriage, denying the girl-child an education, discriminatory seating arrangements in class and how domestic violence affects girl-child education. As clan leader, Lillian has been at the forefront of advocating positive socio-cultural practices like allowing women to inherit customary land, sharing domestic roles, and encouraging peaceful co-existence between husband and wife. Lillian has become a great inspirational icon to women in her community.

## Transformed by the catechist's preaching

Dilish Ogwal has been married to Denish Ogwal for five years now. Denish paid two cows and three goats as Dilish's bride price. In the Lango tradition, a married woman is expected to work tirelessly, to prove to her husband and in-laws that she is worth the bride price that was paid for her. Dilish was subjected to the tradition of shouldering the burden of all the home chores, including gardening, without the support of her husband.

Dilish narrated that they have three children with her husband. But all the years Dilish has been married she has taken care of the family, without any support from her husband. Dilish carries out all the gardening work of clearing the bush, planting, weeding and harvesting, in order to feed her children and in-laws. In addition to the burden she shoulders, her husband waits for the harvest season and uses any small misunderstanding between them to chase her away so that he can take control of the harvest. After he has sold the entire farm produce and spent the money on drinks and enticing other women, he pleads with her to return to their marital home. Dilish always accepts to painfully return home because her parents cannot afford to return the bride price her husband paid for her.

'Each time I returned to my marital home I became very frustrated because there was always no food in the house to feed the children. Coupled with that, all my children were not going to school because we could not afford scholastic materials. Despite what I was going through, I continued working so hard in the garden. At one point I thought of killing myself because I could not withstand the pain I was going through. Each time I discussed my pain with my husband

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'One day I attended a sensitisation meeting in our church that was

conducted by Patrick Akena. Patrick was speaking against negative socio-cultural practices like the denial to women of the right to own property, wife beating and not sharing domestic work. Patrick mentioned that he was trained by ACFODE as a male role model to advocate against negative socio-cultural practices. Immediately after the meeting I approached Patrick and told him my story. Two days later, Patrick, in the company of our catechist, came to my home to settle our case. My husband disrespectfully told them not to interfere with the affairs of his home and chased them away. Patrick then advised me to report the case to Akokoro police outpost. However, I was scared because I had never been to a police station before. Besides, I feared the reaction of my in-laws in case I made the police arrest their son. As encouragement, Patrick escorted me to the police station, where I recorded my statement with the Child and Family Protection Unit. The police officer gave me a summons to take to my husband through the LCI chairperson of our village. After receiving the letter, my husband became so scared because he knew he would be arrested. My husband immediately mobilised his clan leaders and requested them to apologise on his behalf. I accepted to forgive him but made him sign the clan book with an oath to begin helping me in the gardens and never to sell farm produce without my consent. We are now living happily, with enough food in the house and all our children are going to school, at Awila Primary School.'

Dilish attributes all this wonderful unexpected change to ACFODE, who empowered Patrick to help the community of Akokoro promote gender-responsive socio-cultural practices.

# Idep Women's Group stands out for promoting positive cultural practices

In 2013, one of the male role models, Moses Odongo, conducted a sensitisation meeting in Idep Catholic church. During the meeting Odongo talked about the different negative socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women. He mentioned that such practices include forceful wife inheritance, wife beating, forceful and early marriage, denial to women the right to own customary land and selling farm produce without the consent of women. The women of Idep testified that such practices were real and that women were experiencing them on a daily basis. The women, therefore, got the inspiration to form an advocacy group against negative socio-cultural practices. They named the group Idep Women's Group.

The chairperson of Idep Women's Group, Grace Ebong, shared how they formed themselves into a group to advocate positive socio-cultural practices.

'Since most of us were victims of negative socio-cultural practices,' Grace narrated, 'we decided to form an advocacy group as women of Idep Catholic church. As a group we began staging drama shows in churches and trading centres to sensitise communities against negative socio-cultural practices that discriminate against women. The community response towards the drama shows was very positive since for each drama show an average of 300 people would turn up. Apart from staging drama shows every Sunday, we conducted home visits and counselling to households affected by domestic violence.'

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Idep Women's Group were yielding results, our husbands became so supportive, to the extent that some offered their bicycles to be

used by their wives as transport to enable them to reach the drama venue. Eventually, most of the men who are husbands to women in the group joined the drama group and have become extremely active in championing gender-responsive socio-cultural practices through drama shows. Members of the drama group have also taken up leadership positions in the community. For instance Lillian Ogweng, one of the members, was elected chairperson of the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) of Idep Primary School, and four other women have also been elected clan leaders in their respective communities. These women have used their positions to cause positive change in their communities. Through community engagement, the group has learnt that poverty is the major cause of violence against women. Therefore, the group members have started up a village savings and loans association scheme. Every Sunday each member is supposed to save a minimum of 2,000 and a maximum of 10,000 Ugandan shillings. The group also is involved in tablecloth making for sale and has formed a group digging association whereby they dig people's gardens and are paid, to improve their livelihood. These economic initiatives have greatly enhanced the economic status of the group members. Today most of the group members are using their money to pay school fees for their children, buy furniture for their homes, and pay for their medication. In addition, six group members have also bought oxen and ox-ploughs to enable them to cultivate large portion of land for commercial purposes.'



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