



Seventh Day Adventist Church youth constructing an Early Childhood Development Centre in Abim district recently. The project is being implemented by ADRA Uganda. Photos by Lawrence Mulondo

ABIM
By Lawrence Mulondo

Abim embraces early childhood education

Communities in Abim district are embracing Early Childhood Development programmes (ECD) in a bid to prepare their children for primary education.

In the Education Act (2008), the Government recognised pre-primary education as the first stage of education for all children below eight years.

The ECD education sector policy by the gender ministry recognises programmes including nursery schools, daycare, homecare and community centres.

Abim district inspector of schools Rose Okori says the district is emphasising early childhood education to prepare children for primary school.

She adds that the district has 52 early childhood development centres, with nine being run by communities, 34 are owned by churches and 10 privately owned.

“Due to many challenges, only 17 of the fifty two centres operate throughout the year affecting enrolment,” she says.

This year, there are 1,919 children in all ECD centres in Abim of whom 990 girls.

Okori explains that these numbers are still low, adding that there are about 6,000 children in the ages of two to five in the district.

Challenges

Okori cites the lack of infrastructure, such as classrooms and sanitary structures.

She adds that many operate under trees. “Most of the centres lack instructional materials, such as chalk boards,” Okori explains.

She says unlike primary schools where they have a curriculum to follow, the centres do not have a learning framework.

Okori explains that most parents do not provide meals for children which makes them hate school.



Kiberu

She also says some centres fail to secure documents for the land on which the centres sit, leading to wrangles.

Affordability

Okori explains that the private sector and ECD centres have different fees structures ranging between sh30,000 and sh150,000.

Most of these centres are privately owned and financially out of reach of many Ugandans resulting in low enrollment.

Residents speak out

Residents say the standard of learning in the centres



Myklebust

BETWEEN THE LINES

■ There are 1,919 Early Childhood Development centres in Abim of whom 990 are girls.

are not good enough, which makes well-to-do families with no choice but to take their children to schools far away. Those who cannot afford the early learning centres opt to take their children directly to Primary One.

Folder Oyenga, 56, says none of her two grandchildren has ever attended nursery school.



Ofwono

Onyenga adds that she cannot afford the fees in nursery schools, which is at up to sh120,000. “I cannot afford paying for such services for my grandchildren. I will wait for them to turn six and let them join a Universal Primary Education school,” she says.

ADRA involvement

The Bishop of Eastern Uganda Field diocese, Frederick Ofwono, says during their survey on nursery education, some residents expressed the need for a nursery school where children can get early childhood education.



Falk

He says last year, the church, through Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) requested friends in Denmark and Norway for support to have an ECD centre constructed in the area.

“Nursery education is important in a child’s education since it gives one the foundation that teachers in primary school can build on,” Ofwono says.

He adds that unlike other dioceses where there are many church-founded nursery schools, his diocese has only one.

State of the project

The nursery school is being constructed by ADRA Uganda, a development arm of the SDA Church, with sh157m funding from the youth of ADRA Norway and Denmark.

ADRA Karamoja programmes manager George Kiberu says ADRA Uganda has been working with the government and organisations, such as UNICEF to create awareness among the communities that ECD is vital for children.

“We realised the need for an ECD centre to cater for people who are willing to pay for quality education,” he explains.

Kiberu says the centre will open in October.

“Most of the kindergartens focus on reports and marks. Children must interact and learn using the available materials,” he explains.

He adds that they shall not have free education at the centre, but ADRA will solicit sponsorships for children that cannot afford tuition.

Donors step in

Meanwhile, the ADRA team has joined by over 30 of the project partners to help build the school.

Norway Adventist Church youth director Melissa Myklebust says they decided to support the ECD project to help children get exposed to opportunities worldwide.

“ECD is important as children get something to build on when they get older,” she says.

Myklebust explains that the youth use social media to meet at church and to collect to funds.

Allan Falk, a trip leader, says the youth from Norway and Denmark learn a lot from the places they visit.

“Young people usually grow up thinking about themselves. So, it is always good when they get to understand that this world is not only about them. Through these projects, the youth learn that the world can only work when we work together,” he explains.

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT THE EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME



Vicky Adero
I was not confident about the quality of the services offered by nursery schools in Abim. So, I decided to take my daughter to her father in Pader district to have nursery education.



Emmanuel Opio
I am willing to take my son for nursery education, if it is affordable and up to the required standards. However, I do not want my child to have to walk long distances to go to school.



Ruth Acheng
I had lost hope that my five-year-old daughter would ever acquire nursery education as I cannot afford the available school.