



ADRA opens up the eyes of the Karimojong people on advocacy

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), is one of the long-term development partners that have stood with the Karimojong through thick and thin. Decades old in the sub-region, ADRA initially provided basic handouts like any aid organization operating there.

But with pacification of the sub-region, ADRA is now implementing a self-reliant and sustainable program called Action for Social Change program (ASC) in the districts of northern Karamoja that include Abim, Kotido and Kaabong.

The program is made possible with the funding from DANIDA through ADRA Denmark with the main focus on advocacy of many key social issues that include education, health, land rights and other economic related rights. It's now nine years since this program started and the fruits are evident in all the three districts. By 2021, when the program closes, the region will be basking in glory for the many achievements they have attained.

According to George William Kiberu, the program manager of the program, they are using Community Based Organizations, Cultural Leaders' Associations, religious leaders and thirty primary school clubs to implement the activities.

"We are in partnership with two local NGOs in the region that include Karamoja Development Forum and Karamoja Integrated Development Program and not forgetting the local governments of those districts, Kiberu said.

The visit to these districts to assess the impact on the ground proved that the project has opened up the eyes of the Karimojong people. The work on the ground speaks volumes to visitors and to the community. The leaders are impressed with the work of ADRA due to the impact that has been created.

"If am asked to go and testify about this project to the President, I will tell him that this is the only real project which is in touch with the community," remarked the LC3 of Kachei sub-county in Kotido district Jacob Akudo.

Open defecation was synonymous with Abim residents for years however when Canopwonya Development Association and elders Started campaigning against the practice, there is a great reduction, other trainings such as proposal development, resources mobilization, financial training and reporting and evidence based advocacy. The groups have changed the mindset of the group members.

Canopwonya group that consists of 30 members are now champions of change in the district on matters of hygiene and sanitation.

"We use drama to sensitize people on the benefits of the good hygiene and today there is reduction of the open defecation in Otalabar. The people in this village called Otalabar in Atunga sub-county have latrines. ADRA has facilitated us to go to other villages sensitizing people," said Janet Molly Achilla the chairperson of the group.

Gender based violence was also the order of the day but ever since ADRA initiated this project nine years ago, the violence against women has is no longer something majority of men boast about

openly and marrying of girls before the age of consent is shameful to many parents.

"Our efforts has seen enrolment of children at Otalabar primary school shoot up to 1,243, pupils from 700 children that we had in the previous years," remarked Mathias Kionga the secretary of Canopwonya Development Association.

He explained that they were able to achieve high enrollment through convening meetings with parents and local leaders where they would talk about the benefits of education.

"As children are set to go for the long holiday, we are going to talk to them on how they should stay safe especially girls who majority get pregnant," Kionga said. "We have also been able to sensitize our people on dangers of alcoholism because families where parents drink a lot have failed to take their children to school. Since resources are wasted on alcohol," Josephine Akello said.

But majority of parents have responded positively by taking their children to school. On savings, the families have been able to improve on their household income as women venture into small scale business that brings them money daily.

"ADRA trained us on Village Savings and Loans Association (VSLA) where I have been able to educate my children. One has completed nursing course while the second one is yet to complete nursing. I have also educated one until he has completed teaching course. That has been possible through the sale of sliver fish, vegetables and simsim that I sell from the market," said Maritina Auma aged 40.

Through advocacy, this group has been able to demand for better services at Atunga health center and they are now demanding from the district authorities to ensure the facility is upgraded. "We call the pansh, sub-county and district leaders and ask them why we don't get enough drugs yet we deserve the best treatment being taxpayers of this country," said Veronica Akidi.

While the Cultural leaders (Elders) in Abim have been so instrumental in resolving land and cross-border conflicts that had dragged for years without being resolved.

"We settled Kotido-Abim and Abim-Otuke border conflicts. Our focus is now on Napak-Abim and Agago- Abim which is ongoing and hoping that soon we shall resolve it so that our people can leave in a harmonious environment," said Charles Abura.

Through their association, they were able to convene a meeting with the district leaders on a challenge of sachet waragi that had imposed a big danger to the community.

"The district came up with an ordinance to ban waragi and that saved lives. We are happy that our leaders respect



George William Kiberu, the program manager of the program



REV. Florence Adong Omwony of the Anglican diocese Karamoja during an interview

the decisions that we resolve," said Philip Opio the vice chairman of elders association.

Hudson Ogwang, the community support officer for this program is proud that the members are able to lobby from other NGOs to support them with their activities. "Our focus is to see social change and we know that it's a process. Our trainings

of children and preaching against child labour because it ruins the future of Karamoja.

They got a funding of Sh5m to facilitate them conduct those activities. They are yet to design another proposal and ADRA is more than willing to support.

"By the time the program ends, we shall leave no vacuum behind in these

Iteso, the Acholi and the Langi for many years.

The youth commonly known as the Karacuna's used in the past to wreak havoc as they would raid using guns. Many lost their lives while others survived with injuries.

"I was a warrior who used to raid but due to God's grace, I survived and when I returned I joined a savings group where I save ten thousand shillings daily out of selling meat," Simon Adoo a father of seven who owns a butcher said. He was able to start that business after getting a loan from the sacco that offers peoples loans with the lowest interest rate.

"I regret being a warrior. If ADRA was here early, I would not have wasted my time in the bush stealing. I'm happy for their training because we are able to help our families," Adoo explained.

Other members of the group are celebrating the work of the program in educating them on the benefits of savings.

"I deal in chicken business where I get money daily to support my family. As a

primary two drop out, who would employ me? God should bless ADRA for thinking about Karamoja," Local Apaniese said.

That testimony is in conformity with ADRA identity statements that states that they demonstrate God's Love and compassion being a global humanitarian organization.

Going by what they have ventured in this program of Action for Social Change program, they have gone beyond their call of duty.

"Ladies were raped at will here but once

ADRA embarked on sensitizing people about their rights among other things, rape has reduced," Akudo the LC3 of Kachei testified.

He said the locals embraced a go back to school campaign that has seen a large number of pupils abandoned herding

for school.

Moses Ghino the headmaster of Lokiteleabu primary school bears witness to the fact that the number of children who are now at school has tremendously improved.

"The enrollment now stands at 840 pupils and the number of girls is high as compared to the past. In primary seven I had 19 girls sitting for their Primary Leaving Examination (PLE) as opposed to 16 boys," Ghino said. Through the children advocacy clubs, the children were able to raise a challenge of uncompleted classrooms in a public meeting.

"When the children raised that challenge, the local media picked it and Catholic Church rushed for our rescue. The children are more empowered on issues of advocating for services they are meant to have," a happy Ghino said.

The children in their club have also been ambassadors of the sorts. They have been able to pursue their colleagues who dropped out of school to resume with their studies.

Maxwell Lokaino a primary five pupil is one among them who is happy to his friends who approached him herding and convinced him to return to school.

"Ignorance is what made me leave school but I swear I will not drop until my dream of becoming a teacher is fulfilled," Lokaino said.

Desire Marvin Owili, a primary six pupil with ambitions of becoming a doctor said that they pass their messages during public functions in form of music and drama.

Brenda Ayoo with dreams of becoming a pilot says that their drama has wooed many girls back to school and they intend to continue during this long holiday.

"Since we come from the same community, we stage a drama either in church or market where many people come and watch. At the end of the drama, many walk converted into the idea of education or hygiene," Primin Longom a club member stated.

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is a global humanitarian organization of the Seventh day Adventist church. Which starts to serve humanity so they may leave as God intended.



Canopwonya development association in Abim pose for a picture after their meeting

have managed to build confidence among members because in the past people used to view services they were offered as a favor but for now they know that it's their right to have services from duty bearers," Ogwang said.

The religious leaders are equally happy with the project having facilitated them with trainings that have given them a mileage in performing their duties.

Rev. Florence Adong Omwony the diocesan secretary in the Anglican diocese of Karamoja, spoke passionately about the program.

"Besides training us on project proposal, ADRA has enabled us religious leaders to come together and appreciating each other as colleagues," Rev. Adong said.

They helped sensitizing the community of Lareng-Moru on the issue of child labor that was rampant. The children were used to sell charcoal, to be maids and herd cattle.

"Our engagements with the community saved many children who are now at school. In the past we could stop at preaching about salvation but when we got additional training we discovered that we can cause a big change in all aspects of life," Rev. Adong explained. They have spread to the areas of Natiraup advocating for the education

three districts we have been operating in, these CBOs are able to lobby and advocate for their people," Kiberu explained.

Karamoja is synonymous with cattle raiding especially their neighbors the



Simon Adoo the former warrior showing Bullet scars he sustained during the days he was a warrior but he has reformed and now a member of Elochokinos CBO in Kotido