

ADRA empowers Karamoja

By Godfrey Ojore

Adventist Relief Agency (ADRA) is a long-standing development partner, that has supported development efforts in Karamoja.

With 10 years of progressive strides made in the region, ADRA initially provided basic aid and handouts to the people of Karamoja. However, with the disarmament programme and stability of the sub-region, ADRA is now implementing a self-reliant and sustainable programme called Action for Social Change (ASC) in Abim, Kotido and Kaabong districts.

The programme is funded by the Danish International Development Agency (DANIDA), whose main focus is promotion social issues that include education, health, land rights and other economic-related rights. It is nine years since the project started and the fruits are evident in all the three districts.

By 2021, when the programme ends, the region will be basking in the glory of the many achievements they have attained. George William Kiberu, the programme manager of the project, says they are using elders' associations, religious leaders and 60 primary school clubs to implement their project goals.

"We are in partnership with two non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the region that include Karamoja Development Forum and Karamoja Integrated Development Programme. We have also worked with the local leaders to bring about positive change," Kiberu says.

The achievements of the project are evident to the Karimojong community and all those who visit the project. The local leaders are impressed with ADRA's work, especially because of the impact the project has had.

"If I was to tell President Yoweri Museveni about the project, I would say it is the only project which is in touch with our community," Jacob Akudo, the LC3 chairperson of Kacheri sub-county in Kotido district, says.

Promoting hygiene

In the past, residents of Abim practised open defecation and resisted the construction of latrines. However, since Canopwonya Development Association and the community elders were trained on proposal development, resources mobilisation, financial management, reporting skills and evidence-based advocacy, the groups have changed the mindset of the community.

The Canopwonya has



Women performing in a recent function in Nakapiripirit



George William Kiberu



The Rev Florence Adong

30 members who are now champions of change in the district on matters of hygiene and sanitation.

"We use drama to sensitise people about the benefits of sanitation. Today, the people of Otalabar in Atunga sub-county have latrines. ADRA has facilitated us and enabled us to sensitise other communities about the importance of proper toilet use," Janet Molly Achilla, the chairperson of the group, says.

Ambassadors of change

Moses Ghino, the headteacher of Lokitelaebu Primary School, says: "The enrolment now stands at 840 pupils and the number of girls is higher than it was in the past. In Primary Seven, I had 19 girls sitting for their Primary Leaving Examinations and only 16 boys."

The school has empowered its pupils to set up an advocacy club through which they petitioned the school about their uncompleted classrooms in a public meeting.

"When the children raised that challenge, the local media picked it up and the Catholic church rushed to our rescue. The children are more empowered now, on issues of

advocating for services they are meant to have," Ghino says.

Through their club, the pupils have been positive influencers, who have reached out to their fellow students who had dropped out of school to resume their studies. Maxwell Lokaino, a Primary Five pupil, who had dropped out was encouraged by his peers to return to school.

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

Desire Marvin Owilli, a Primary Six pupil, whose ambition is to become a medical doctor, says they share their messages of change during public functions in form of music and drama.

Brenda Ayoo says her dream is to become a pilot. She says they staged a drama that has since helped to encourage girls who had dropped out of school to return.

"Since we come from the same community, we stage a drama either in church or in the market where many people come and watch. At the end of the drama, many take the messages of education or hygiene seriously," Primin Longom, a club member, says.



Adoo showing the scars he got during cattle raids

Socioeconomic empowerment

The household income has grown as women venture into small scale businesses that bring in money daily.

"Since ADRA trained us on how to save, I have educated my children. One has completed a nursing course and the second one is following suit. My other child has recently completed a teaching course. That has been possible through my business of selling fish, vegetables and simsim in the market," Maritina Auma, aged 40, says.

Through advocacy, Canopwonya Association has demanded better services at Atunga Health Centre.

"We call the parish, sub-county and district leaders and ask them why we don't get enough drugs yet we deserve the best treatment, because we are taxpayers," Veronica Akidi says.

Also, the elders in Abim worked at resolving land and inter-border conflicts that had dragged on for many years.

"We settled the Kotido-Abim and Abim-Otuke border conflicts. Our focus is now on Napak-Abim and Agago-Abim, which is ongoing. Our goal is to create a harmonious environment for all," Charles Abura says.

Through their association, they convened a meeting with the district leaders and

challenged the selling of sachet alcohol that had brought instability in the community, especially through domestic violence.

"The district came up with an ordinance to ban waragi and that saved lives. We are happy that our leaders respect our decisions," Philip Opio, the vice-chairperson of the elders' association, says.

Hudson Ogwang, the community support officer of the project, is proud that the members can lobby other NGOs to support their activities.

"Our focus is to see social change and we know that it is a process. Our trainings has built our members' confidence to advocate change. In the past, people viewed the provision of services as a favour, but they now know it is their right to have them," Ogwang says.

The Rev Florence Adong Omwony, the diocesan secretary in the Anglican diocese of Karamoja, speaks passionately about the project. "In addition to training us on project proposals, ADRA has enabled us, religious leaders, to come together and appreciate each other," she says.

The project has sensitised the people of Lareng-Moru against child labour. "Our engagements with the community rescued children from labour camps back

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE CURBED

Gender-based violence was also rampant in Karamoja, but since the project started, violence against women has significantly reduced.

Consequently, early marriages have also been curbed as more and more girls get enrolled into school.

"Enrolment at Otalabar Primary School has shot up to 1,243 pupils, from the 700 we had in the previous years," Mathias Kionga, the secretary of Canopwonya Association, says.

He said they were able to achieve high enrolment levels through convening meetings with parents and local leaders, where they would talk about the benefits of education.

"As children head into the long holiday, we shall talk to them about how they should remain safe. We will caution the girls against getting pregnant," Kionga says.

"We have sensitised our people on the dangers of alcoholism because families with alcoholic parents had failed to educate their children. Our efforts have had a positive impact because many of the families are now able to send their children to school," Josephine Akello, another group member, says.

into school. In the past, we could stop at preaching about salvation, but when we got this training, we discovered that we can cause change in all aspects of life," the Rev Adong explains.

Youth rehabilitated

For many years, Karamoja was synonymous with cattle raiding, especially with their neighbours, the Iteso and the Langi. In the past, the youth, commonly known as the Karacunas, wreaked havoc in the community during those raids.

"I was a warrior and used to raid cattle. When I abandoned the practice and returned home, I joined the savings group, where I save sh10,000 daily, which is my profit from the butcher,"

Simon Adoo, a father of seven says. He got a loan from the SACCOS to start a business. ADRA is a global humanitarian organisation that believes in the holistic development of a human being.