

JUNE 2024 NEWSLETTER

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Top News

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FICH at a Glance

Vision: We exist to see a thriving and self-reliant communities in Uganda

Mission: To transform Youth, Women and Families through education, training and opportunities in a thriving community

18,520 served: Women, children and families through Education, training and opportunities to thrive in the community.

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Dear Reader,

Welcome to the June edition of the FICH Newsletter! I am delighted to share with you the latest updates, insights, and achievements from our ongoing initiatives aimed at transforming lives and strengthening inclusive development in Oyam District.

This edition features some critical findings and initiatives that highlight both the challenges and strides we are making in the education sector. For instance, the recent Uwezo Learning Assessment report reveals significant gaps in literacy and numeracy among our children, reminding us of the urgent need for foundational improvements.

We are also excited to announce the launch of the Girls' Empowerment School Retention Program at Akwangi Primary School. This initiative, is led by former GRiC fellow Sharon Achan. Moreover, the recent household data collected by our Village Education Committees sheds light on the gender disparities in school dropout rates. With 64% of girls dropping out before Primary 7, compared to 36% of boys, it is evident that we have much work to do.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to our shared vision.

Warm regards,

Emmy Zoomlamai Okello,

Executive Director,

Foundation for Inclusive Community Help (FICH)



Francis Odongo Ali, Chairperson for PWDs in Oyam district, attribute poor performance in most UPE schools to the constant chasing of learners for unpaid school dues. He called upon school administrators to find amicable ways of collecting school fees without sending learners home.

Rev. Teddy Akello Omara, Chairperson of the SMC at Ayanyi PS, pointed out the lack of parental support as a significant factor in poor student performance. She noted that many pupils attend school without necessary supplies and that parents are often unwilling to pay school fees.

Uwezo Learning Assessment Scorecard angers Oyam Leaders, Educationists

In 2021, Uwezo Uganda, in partnership with FICH, conducted a Learning Assessment in 15 villages in Oyam district to evaluate children's literacy and numeracy competencies. The key findings for Oyam district are alarming: only 5% of children in Primary 3 are able to perform Primary 2 level work, and less than half of the learners can read and comprehend a P2 text or perform basic division. Among P3 students, who are expected to learn in the local language, 76% are non-readers. Even by P6, 56% of the children cannot read and comprehend a text in the local language. The assessment, which tested 440 pupils across 29 districts, revealed that less than 50% of learners in P3-P7 could read a Primary 2 (P2) story in English or perform basic division, placing Oyam District at number 24 out of 29 districts evaluated. The Uwezo assessment, conducted in August 2021, focused on literacy and numeracy based on the P2 curriculum.

Jennet Acol, the District Inspector of Schools for Oyam, attributed the poor performance to a lack of focus on foundational learning in the lower grades, which significantly impacts outcomes in higher grades. During a policy dialogue organized by the Foundation for Inclusive Community Help (FICH), Acol emphasized the need for better training and capacity-building initiatives for teachers in lower primary classes, as well as regular refresher courses to ensure teachers remain effective and focused on early childhood education.

Nommy Otyeno, the Oyam District Council Speaker, revealed that the district has initiated a regular school monitoring team to address these issues. He urged the government to create conducive learning environments and to revise Universal Primary Education (UPE) policies. Uwezo plans to conduct similar assessment in Oyam district in July/August 2024



Presents shocking outcome of Gender-biased in education

A recent report by Village Education Committees (VECs) in Oyam district has revealed concerning disparities in school dropout rates between boys and girls. Data collected from 660 households across 11 villages between June and August 2023 highlights a significant gender bias in education.

According to the report, 64% of girls drop out of school before reaching Primary 7, compared to only 36% of boys. While there has been slight improvement due to Parental Empowerment and Engagement (PEE) initiatives, the gap remains significant.

Reasons for the Disparity

The VECs attribute the disparity to several factors:

Gender Bias: Parents in Oyam district tend to favor boys over girls, creating a stronger bond with their sons. This bias makes it difficult for girls to share their educational challenges, particularly those related to

body changes during adolescence.

Parental Involvement: There is a poor perception among parents regarding participation in school activities. Only 12% of parents in the surveyed villages provided adequate educational materials for their children.

Positive Developments

Despite these challenges, there have been some positive changes. Denis Opio Olabo, the Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability, and Learning (MEAL) officer at FICH, noted improvements due to continuous engagement through the VECs. "PEE initiatives have started to enlighten parents about the importance of being proactive in their children's education. School attendance has improved, although it remains challenging during farming seasons", Opio explained

The report was shared with the VECs during a reflection session on the household data collected. The MEAL department plans to continue tracking changes and gathering data with the help of the VECs to monitor progress.



FICH launches Girls' Empowerment Program to Boost School Retention

FICH launches Girls' Empowerment School Retention Program at Akwangi Primary School in Oyam District with support from GRiC. This initiative stems from a proposal submitted by GRiC fellow Sharon Achan, as part of the GRiC Africa Youth Leadership Program. Achan's proposal emerged as the second-best in the third cohort of 2023. Through this project, Achan aims to ensure that girls aged 10-17 stay in school and complete their primary education.

"By engaging with the community, parents, teachers, and opinion leaders, we will mentor these young girls on essential life skills such as self-awareness. We will also provide training on menstrual hygiene, including how to make and use sanitary towels—an important step in reducing school dropout rates," Achan explains.

Lawrence Ocaya, the Head Teacher at Akwangi Primary School, emphasized the importance of how we nurture our children: "When we buy dolls for our children, we buy cars for boys and babies for girls, which means we are preparing our girls to be mothers. Even during marriage, the maids we present are very young girls, triggering marriage thoughts in these girls."

Nicholas Opio Awelo, the local council three chairperson of Iceme sub-county, appealed for increased parental involvement in children's education. "Parents must ensure their children are active and productive in their learning. We can also nurture the talents each child exhibits at school, beyond academics, to keep them engaged," he added.

The Girls' Empowerment School Retention Program will run for 180 days at Akwangi Primary School in its pilot stage, aiming to create a supportive environment for girls to thrive and complete their education.



EmpowerED Future: 36 Teachers undergo TaRL training

Foundational learning has a significant impact on how children learn more complex subjects at higher levels, especially with passionate teachers. A four-day training was attended by 36 teachers, 9 head teachers, and 8 mentors from nine schools in Northern Uganda (Oyam, Kole, and Arua) to help shape the learners' future.

The training focused on improving their teaching techniques through the Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) methodology.

It was spearheaded by the FICH, with funding from the Grassroot Nest for Innovation and Change (GRIC).

According to Patrick Ocen, director of Programmes at FICH, the workshop's goal was to provide teachers, head teachers, and mentors with a basic understanding of TaRL.

According to Ocen, the TaRL methodology has been implemented in nine schools in Northern Uganda, including Lango, Acholi, and West Nile.

Samwel Mwayi, TaRL's East Africa overseer and quality assurance control personnel, confirmed that the methodology is an initiative that works with learners who are far behind.

"It is not a class based approach, it is a level based approach that favours learners based furthest from grade 3-5 in order to bring them to levels with parity with their peers."

Felix Ogwang, TaRL Master Trainer, stated that TaRL is unique in that it promotes learners based on ability rather than grades.

He says the TaRL programme covers the packages of syllabus, numeracy, literacy among others handled at the lower levels of learning since it is a foundation of introducing learners to fast and simplified learning.

Anthony Nam, headteacher of Aloni Primary School in Oyam district, stated that the TaRL programme came at an appropriate time, noting that most learners in various classes are simply promoted without regard for their level or ability.

"We have learners in P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5 and so on and sometimes the teachers go on assessing pupils based on their class and end up forgetting about the level of the child, something he says the teachers have used for long," he said.

Sali Adania, headteacher of Niva Primary School in Arua City in the West Nile sub-region, praised FICH and GRIC's efforts to improve teaching performance and development.

"In Uganda, especially Northern Uganda and West Nile, our level of education has dropped"

UPCOMING EVENT

Second Uwezo Learning Assessment to Begin in July in Oyam District

We are excited to announce that FICH, in partnership with Uwezo Uganda, is launching the second Uwezo National Household-Based Learning Assessment for children aged 4-16 years. This comprehensive assessment will be conducted across 29 districts nationally, including 15 villages in Oyam District, with support of volunteers who shall be recruited from the listed villages.

FICH has already commenced pre-assessment activities, including household listing in the selected villages and the recruitment of volunteers who will assist in the assessment process. These preparations ensure that we are ready for the main assessment activities, which will peak at the end of July to Aug.



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07/08

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Felix Ogwang(C) introduces teachers to various TaRL methods of teaching Numeracy and Literacy Eg Clam and Snap, Number jump, etc



Samwel Mwayi, GRiC and TaRL overseer trains Ugandan teachers on the methodology



Oyam District Speaker, Nommy Otieno during Uwezo Education Dialogue at Rainbow Hotel



Participants who launched the girls retention program at Akwangi PS

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