WOMEN TAKING CHARGE

Highlighting Milestones from the “Advancing Gender Accountability and Participation in Local Governance Processes” project
For communities to take charge of their destinies and demand good governance and accountable leadership, they must be well prepared for the task. Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE) received support from USAID/UKAID under the Governance, Accountability, Participation and Performance (GAPP) Program to implement the “Advancing Gender Accountability and Participation in Local Governance processes” Project in Masindi, Amuru and Gulu districts. The project aimed to promote gender equality and democratic governance through enhancing grassroots leaders’ participation in political and budgetary processes. The project employed a multipronged approach to community empowerment including civic competence building, capacitating local level legislators to enhance their effectiveness in their legislatures, and building personal and communal leadership through Village Budget clubs (VBCs) and mock parliaments. This publication highlights successes from the AGAP, especially the VBC approach through which local level service delivery is engendered and community members become experts at monitoring service delivery and the local government budget, and advocating for improved lives of the most vulnerable people.
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The stories of change documented in this booklet emanate from the 24 month “Advancing Gender Accountability and Participation in Local Governance Processes” project implemented by FOWODE in partnership with the Governance, Accountability, Participation and Performance (GAPP) Program with support from USAID / UKAID in the 3 districts of Amuru, Gulu and Masindi. The project whose aim was to promote gender equality and democratic governance through enhancing grassroots leaders’ participation in political and budgetary processes empowered communities and civil society to be able to monitor and demand for effective gender sensitive service delivery. Furthermore it enhanced the oversight function of 3 district councils and advocacy skills to influence plans and budgets from a gender perspective.

It is evident that this project undoubtedly addressed some of the core governance issues that affected the quality of service delivery in the 6 sub counties that it targeted. It built a community based monitoring and accountability mechanism and provided opportunity for rights holders to engage and hold duty bearers accountable for equitable service delivery. It also provided spaces for nurturing leadership especially among the youth and women. As citizens discovered their potential in terms of influencing decision making, the perceptions and attitudes held overtime were demystified as reflected in the stories of change.

I thank the rights holders who responded positively to the project at inception and were able to hold local government officials accountable in gender sensitive service delivery. This has resulted into increased commitment and action by the duty bearers to address the underlying challenges that have been hindering access to quality services which will in turn promote participation, improve performance of local governments and lead to enhanced good governance and social accountability.

Finally, I thank USAID / UKAID and the Governance, Accountability, Participation and Performance (GAPP) Program the sponsors of this project, whose support made this project possible.

Patricia Munabi Babiiha
Executive Director, FOWODE
VOICES FOR IMPROVED MATERNAL HEALTH:
The Story of Kyatiri Health Center
Kyatiri health center III lies in Kyatiri parish, Pakanyi Sub County, Masindi district. Being the only health center III in Pakanyi Sub County, it serves a population of 60,162 citizens, 30,158 of whom are female. It is the only facility offering delivery services for mothers in this particular sub county.

When the AGAP project was initiated in Masindi district in 2014, Pakanyi sub county was selected as one of the two sub counties in which the project would be implemented. Masindi local government recommended Pakanyi because it is the biggest in the district and faced several service delivery challenges.

At the onset of the project, a VBC whose members were selected by the community was formed and subsequently trained in Pakanyi. Indeed when the VBCs first monitored service delivery at Kyatiri health center III in November 2014, they discovered that the maternity section was nonfunctional due to a collapsed ceiling and a partly collapsed roof. Maternity services had been shifted to one tiny room that used to be a store. This was limiting both in terms of space as the facility could only take a few mothers, and also compromised privacy as mothers who had just delivered shared a ward with male patients.

This caused mothers to shun this health facility and trek great distances to Masindi town for antenatal services and deliveries. This condition had existed for over a year by the time of their visit.

The VBCs in an interface meeting held in December 2014 engaged the District Health Officer, and the Chief Administration Officer (CAO) on the status of this facility. The DHO made a commitment to acquire emergency funding to fix this problem. In another interface meeting in 2015, the VBCs engaged the DHO on the unfulfilled promise, but also went ahead to petition the Masindi district council over the issue. Funding was acquired through budget re-allocations and the ceiling and roof were repaired in April 2015.

Rehabilitation of this facility cut short the distance trekked by mothers in Pakanyi sub county and by the time the VBCs carried out a follow up visit in June 2015, the number of visits at the maternity ward had increased from an average of 10 women per day to 35 women per day. Consequently, there was an increase in deliveries for instance in March 67 deliveries were registered while in September they were 85 and by mid-October 2015 when the data was collected they had already registered 79 deliveries.
IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY: In the Education Sector
Village Budget Clubs act as the community’s voice in their areas of operation. The poor performance of education institutions / schools and the conditions under which students learn was a major focus of VBCs under the AGAP project.

In Masindi district, Bwijanga sub county, the VBCs carried out service delivery monitoring at Kihole primary school at the beginning of 2014. A number of findings were made by the VBCs. The school was facing severe classroom space constraints despite innovation from school management. P1 and P2 pupils shared one classroom and simply faced different directions. The VBCs also observed that female students toilet was full and they therefore shared toilet facilities with male students and teachers. To make matters worse, these toilets lacked doors. This was a key gender concern for the VBCs as it denied female students privacy and exposed them to possible abuse.

The VBCs engaged the school and sub county leadership through community interface meetings. During the 2nd term of 2015, the VBCs managed to lobby the management of Kinyara Sugar Factory to assist in emptying the girls toilet. This was done and now girls are able to use their separate facilities in privacy. The sub county leadership also put doors on the toilets for the males. Additionally, the VBCs successfully convinced the Sub County leadership to repair the borehole in the school compound that was non-functional providing a permanent water source to the pupils and thus improving hygiene.
IMPROVED OVERSIGHT
By Women Concillors
Following our engagement with women and youth councilors’ caucuses in Amuru District to reinforce the work done with VBCs, special attention was drawn to issues affecting women and girls at service delivery units. In one of the monitoring visits to Awer Health Centre II in Koro sub county, councilors discovered an incomplete structure that was meant to be a maternity ward which also lacked sufficient delivery beds. Through lobbying the district council, councilors influenced the district to give priority to Awer health center II and also lobbied for the health centre to be upgraded to a HCIII due to the long distances that expectant mothers had to trek to reach the health facility. In August 2015, the district council allocated 2,000,000/- for the renovation of the maternity ward and purchased two more delivery beds in addition to the 2 existing beds in the labour suite. Eventually, the health centre was up-graded into a Health centre III given that it was equipped with maternal facilities for antenatal, pre and post delivery services and drugs. Resultantly, 62 women were registered per month as having accessed maternal health services at the centre as compared to the situation before renovation and equipping of the maternity ward where only 15 women were reported to have attended antenatal and delivered from the health centre.

Adong Margaret, Chairperson of Oboo Parish said, “Between 2014 to mid-2015, only about 5 to 15 mothers per month received care at the health centre, presently, 62 mothers deliver at the center per month. The community now trusts the health centre to deliver quality services.” The journey began with Adong Margaret and her fellow councilors Aol Margaret Agaba, Vice-chairperson Agwaryugi Parish and Aloyo Vicky, Secretary Guru Guru Parish who were determined to take action and to lead the change they wanted to see.
WITNESSING TRANSFORMATION:
VBCs Contribute to Breaking Barriers
The VBCs have not only impacted service delivery and enhanced good governance, the interactions within the clubs have led to improved family relations as evidenced in the story below:

My husband used to sell all of the harvest and leave me in the house without enough food and he would then drink all the money. Whenever I would ask him where the money was he would beat me up and threaten to send me away from home. This continued even after we returned home from the refugee camp. I eventually confided in my neighbor and she told me about the Village Budget Club (VBC) savings group they were setting up. Her husband was also a member and he talked to my husband and convinced him that it was a good idea that we both joined the Oaa Saving group in 2014, a VBC initiated savings association.

During the VBC meetings, the Chairperson talked about family relations and the importance of working together; and slowly I noticed a change in my husband’s attitude; he started returning home early and he consulted me on issues relating to money which wasn’t the case before. We started planning together and we invested our savings from the crops we sold and in 2014, we bought 2 oxen. With this livestock and another 2 oxen which we borrowed from the savings group, we planted 2 gardens of rice and groundnuts. The proceeds helped us put all our children in school now and we can afford to buy for them what they need to improve their education. In November 2014, I was elected to become the Chairperson for the Savings group and my husband was really proud of me.”

Grace Amony,
Lamogi sub-County
NURTURING LEADERSHIP: Inspiration Through Mock Parliaments
Hon. Susan Akumu is now a councilor in Lakwana Sub County and secretary for community services, Gulu district. She tells the story of how Mock Parliaments inspired her to stand for elective office.

“Before FOWODE introduced the mock parliaments, I used to think that debating in council was very hard and only for those who could speak good English, I never considered myself a public speaker. When the mock parliament was setup in Lakwana, my friend Harriet encouraged me to join the group. I was elected by group members as chief whip for our mock parliament. We sat as a mock parliament to discuss issues affecting the country and our community and I kept participating and debating in our local language. Towards the 2016 elections, I was approached by two community members asking why I don’t stand as their councilor. They said they used to watch me debate in the mock parliament. I picked up courage and offered myself. I was very glad to be elected and to be given leadership for community services.”

Mock parliaments are structures set up to provide a platform for women, men, youth and PWDs to enhance knowledge on rights, debate contemporary community issues and devise strategies for dealing with them, and to nurture and groom young women and men for leadership. The AGAP set up three mock parliaments in Gulu, Masindi and Amuru districts comprising of 90 members (42 female, 48 male). Members elected leaders among themselves to mimic an actual Council/Parliament with a speaker, clerk, chief whip, and proposition and opposition sides.

Figure 11: Members of Lakwana Mock Parliament in Gulu elect their leaders
The Mock Parliaments enabled members familiarize themselves with how councils operate. In Gulu district, four more members of the Lakwana mock parliament stood for elective office as councilors; Odong Geoffrey is now the speaker for Lakwana Sub County council, Harriet Ajok is secretary for production and marketing, Bongomin Stephen is youth councilor and secretary for finance, and Mego Aldina is councilor for the elderly. In Masindi, Namugga Hamidah is councilor for PWDs in Pakanyi Sub County.

Mock parliaments also acted as voices for their communities on issues of national and local interest. A number of debates by mock parliaments were picked up by the local and national media. In the run-up to elections, the Masindi mock parliament was quoted in national media on issues regarding perception of citizens on the role of the National Electoral Commission. http://www.theinsider.ug/masindi-voters-dissatisfied-with-ec

We have been greatly empowered by FOWODE. We used to think that schools are for head teachers and health facilities for medical personnel. We used to think that the roads are for government until one day when we were asked who government is and discovered that we are government ourselves and therefore the facilities are ours. Now we know and we fear nobody. We can walk to the office of the CAO or S/Cty chief with confidence and demand for better services.

Okello Andrew, Amuru district
REACH IN NUMBERS:

- **120** VBC members in 6 Sub counties
- **30** Women councilors worked with in 3 districts
- **41** Women leaders trained at National level
- **90** Members of mock parliaments
- **5,175** Community members reached by civic education initiatives
- **3,700** People participate in interface and dialogue events by VBCs
Need to further engender service delivery

We hope to continue working with the VBCs to engender service delivery by reaching out to new subcounties in the districts of Amuru, Gulu and Masindi. The VBCs whose membership is comprised of 60% women will lead their communities as they demand for their rights, for quality services that address the needs of both women and men and for the opportunity to participate and contribute to their governance.

Capacitating councilors for effective legislative engagement

More than 70% of the elected councilors in the 3 districts are new entrants. For women to lead confidently in a male dominated arena and ensure that women’s needs are integrated into laws and budgets, it requires intentional preparation. We plan to equip female local level legislators with the requisite knowledge and skills that will enable them build agency and voice to advocate for women’s needs. Gender responsive planning and budgeting will be a critical component of the capacity enhancement.

Engendering planning and budgeting – the Certificate for Gender and Equity

FOWODE was at the forefront of the advocacy for the Certificate for Gender and Equity (which we began in 2011) that is now part of the Public Finance and Management Act 2015. The Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development in consultation with the Equal Opportunities Commission issues a certificate for all Budget Framework Papers and Ministerial Policy Statements confirming their compliance to the integration of gender and equity issues. To date a lot of focus has been paid to the MDAs at national level to ensure their compliance and yet planning and budgeting is a bottom up process. We would like to support the local governments through capacitating technocrats and councilors at district and subcounty levels so to ensure proper implementation of the guidelines for the CGE especially at the local level.

PROMISING APPROACHES

Engendering service delivery and local governance processes by building sustainable community driven change and empowering communities with the skills they need to seek and participate in democratic governance and social accountability promises to deliver lasting change.

GOING FORWARD……..

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I have sacrificed myself and made bricks, constructed teachers latrines and I am confident that my contribution shall bring development in this school.

**Lamwaka Veronica, Gulu district**

“The training has sharpened me and gained Knowledge of considering women, men, children in all aspects and ensure that the the local government budgets are gender sensitive”

**Atuhura Herison (VBC Bwijanga Masindi District)**

“I will not allow to be taken for granted now that I have the knowledge on the Local Government Legal and Policy Framework. I know how it is supposed to be conducted and how to participate in the budgeting processes. I will make sure that I am a part of the budgeting process in my sub county now starting from the village budgeting to the sub county budgeting”.

**Adong Tereza, Amuru Sub County.**

Since I was born, this is my first time to monitor government programs, I feel empowered because I have learnt new things. It is not good for citizens to just sit back and watch leaders do everything for them, it’s a good practice to know what they are doing and how they are doing it. In that way I can fight embezzlement of funds in my District”.

**Lamwunu Vicky, Amuru Sub County.**
Research, documentation and IEC materials are a critical component of all our projects as they inform our policy engagement.
Contact us

Forum for Women in Democracy (FOWODE),
Plot 15, Vuba Close, Ntinda-Nakawa Stretcher Road,
Ntinda-Kampala, Uganda
Tel: (+256 414 286 063)
Email: fowode@fowode.org
Website: www.fowode.org
Facebook.com/forumforwomenindemocracy/
twitter.com/fowode_uganda