

# Increasing Parental/Community Participation In Pupils' Quality Learning Using Participatory Tools

UPHOLD designed participatory and innovative tools to facilitate community action on key issues affecting pupils' quality learning in schools such as defilement; hunger at school; pupils and teachers' attendance; hygiene; high drop out rates, especially for girls; and HIV/AIDS. The tools are mainly pictorial to enable all parents, even those who cannot read, to use them well. The tools are action-oriented and guide parents and communities to assess, reflect and act through classroom observation, school compound observation, home visits and meetings with school management.

Using the tools, parents at Orawa Primary School in Arua district identified a number of issues affecting their children's learning and planned actions, including:-

- Collection of local materials such as leaves, boxes, cut out cassava sticks and seeds such as maize, beans, etc to assist teachers teach children with concrete objects;
- Immediate organization of a general PTA meeting to discuss the lack of adequate seating for pupils, which hinders their ability to read and write in class;
- Removal of an anthill within three days which blocks two latrine stances;
- Adoption of a Safe School Contract with parents, teachers and Head teacher that commits pupils to move in groups of two or more to avoid situations that will lead to defilement;
- Provision of snacks starting next term to enable pupils to concentrate throughout the day.

Parents have enthusiastically embraced the call to become involved in their children's learning in other districts as well. Over 200 parents at Katosa Primary School in Kyenjojo district squeezed into school desks arranged in a circle in the shade of a large tree in the school compound to discuss the tools and their role. The meeting was planned for three hours, but when UPHOLD's Community Participation Coordinator tried to close the meeting, explaining apologetically that no arrangements had been made for lunch, the parents refused to leave. One parent explained, "The questions we are discussing here are more important than eating." Each parent had the opportunity to speak and everyone made commitments to improve the school latrines and hand washing facilities for the children.

Parents at Nyankwanzi Primary School, also in Kyenjojo District, called an emergency meeting to discuss pupils' performance and actions parents will take so that pupils have basic requirements for school such as food, pens, books, by the start of the second term. Parents also discussed how to help their children avoid HIV/AIDS and resolved to start dialogue with their children that evening about abstinence.

After passionate discussions, everyone in Nyankwanzi Primary School resolved to do their part to promote pupils' learning:

*Parents:* Visit schools to discuss pupils' performance, provide meals and time for homework, check pupils' books

*PTA/SMC:* Monitor teachers, pupil & Head Teacher attendance

*Local Councils:* Visit homes of children not in school & talk to parents

*Head Teacher:* Invite parents to observe teachers teaching & discuss pupils' performance

*Teachers:* Teach and be good role models to children at school

*Religious leaders:* Preach about parental responsibility in pupils' education starting Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2005

*"If you leave your cattle to graze unattended on your neighbour's land, when you go to look for your cows you will only find hides,"*

a parent in Katosa explained to remind parents of their responsibility to visit schools. The message was immediately understood by all. As a result, the teachers at Katosa are looking forward to seeing parents and guardians at school to follow up on children's performance.

Parents expressed some reservations about observing classroom teaching, possibly related to their lack of literacy. However, teachers' invitations to parents resulted in promises to visit and be more involved in monitoring their children's performance.

UPHOLD will continue to work with primary schools in the 20 partner districts through the Education Management Strengthening Initiative, Teacher Effectiveness efforts, radio, print materials, leaders and community development workers to improve quality learning through parental and community involvement.