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Country and community information



Uganda

ActionAid in Uganda



Uganda facts:

- The population is 24.7 million people
- One in seven children dies before they reach their fifth birthday
- Average life expectancy is 44 years
- 33% of adults are illiterate

Uganda is situated in eastern Africa on the northern shores of Lake Victoria, bordering Congo, Sudan, Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda. Its varied landscape includes the Ruwenzori Mountains in the west, swamplands around Lake Victoria, forested hills in the south and the arid grasslands of the north.

More than a decade of relative stability has followed years of tyranny and civil conflict which destroyed schools, hospitals, roads, homes and industries and left many thousands of people dead. Infrastructure and basic services are slowly being rebuilt, though unrest continues to destabilise many parts of the country. English is the official language, but Swahili and Luganda are the most widely spoken languages.

Uganda is one of the poorest countries in the world. Rural poverty is widespread – only 50 percent of families have access to safe water and life expectancy is just 44 years. Most of the families ActionAid works with depend on subsistence farming to survive.

Approximately 820,000 people in Uganda are affected by HIV/AIDS. Most of the people affected are aged between fifteen and forty-nine so their illness may have a devastating impact on the income or farming activity of their whole family.

ActionAid has been operating in Uganda since 1981. We support the basic needs and rights of the country's poorest people. We work at a practical level to improve poor people's access to services and lobby the government and other decision-makers for changes to the policies and practices that affect their lives.

Making a difference to the poorest people

ActionAid works with communities to identify the most important local issues and how best to tackle their problems. Every project we are involved with in Uganda is different, but the main types of work are described here.



Water

Most families (usually the women and children) collect water from open rivers, swamps or scattered boreholes. Elsewhere, they walk for hours to the nearest source and have to carry up to 20 litres home again. Some cattle farmers have to follow their livestock to distant water points during the dry season, leaving their families at home.

ActionAid has been working with communities to ensure they can access safe, clean water, vital to improving health.

Health

Health facilities are very limited in rural areas. Small health units can be found in some villages providing basic healthcare such as immunisation and family planning, but there are rarely doctors in attendance. Few mothers are able to travel the necessary distance to take their children to immunisation sessions. Drugs and medical services are too expensive for poor families. Most villagers rely on local knowledge and traditional remedies.

Living positively with HIV

Mrs Bukenya was treated as an outcast in Apac when she was diagnosed HIV positive. Her husband rejected her and told their children to keep away from her. Sent to relatives in a neighbouring village, she received counselling from a community organisation supported by ActionAid and gradually her will to live returned. Her counsellor spent time with the family and her husband – who subsequently trained as a community HIV/AIDS educator – asked her to come home. Mrs Bukenya tells her story at workshops for other people living with HIV and their families:

Although my life is soon ending, I am happy that I am not dying as an outcast. I am appreciated and loved as I am.

ActionAid works with villagers to establish local health committees and train village health workers. Through these representatives, the wider community can learn about the importance of sanitation and immunisation against killer diseases such as measles, diphtheria and meningitis. A programme of immunisation has already helped thousands of children.

Traditional birth attendants (village midwives) are trained by ActionAid in safe delivery techniques, to improve the health of children and mothers.



High levels of HIV infection and large numbers of deaths from AIDS are putting a strain on communities, leaving many children orphaned and putting extra pressure on an already stretched health service.

ActionAid pioneered the country's leading HIV/AIDS support agency, The AIDS Support Organisation (TASO), which is now a model for other countries. It provides services and support to around 60,000 people. TASO aims to develop positive approaches to care and prevention in the community, providing counselling and support for those living with HIV and their families.

Education

There are schools in most rural areas, but the buildings are often dilapidated. Teaching materials are limited and the quality of teaching is poor. Although primary education is free, uniforms (which are compulsory), equipment, books and maintenance of the school buildings all have to be paid for by the parents. As a result, poor families simply cannot afford to send their children to school. Many children are also needed to help with work at home, in the fields or looking after younger brothers and sisters and cannot spare the time to go to school.

Improving attendance at schools and making sure children get at least a basic education is vital to the future development of poor communities. ActionAid is working with villagers to build and equip schools and help to improve teacher training. We also set up centres where children can attend classes at flexible times – often early in the morning – to fit in with housework and farming.

ActionAid runs a major programme of distance teacher training in co-operation with the Ugandan government. The Mubende Integrated Teacher Education Project (MITEP) started by training teachers and is now being extended to other parts of Uganda.

ActionAid works with communities to improve adult literacy so that people have the confidence and skills to work on

initiatives planned with ActionAid. Our radical adult literacy programme, *Reflect*, pioneered by ActionAid in Uganda, is now in use in over 60 countries by 350 organisations. It is far more successful than traditional approaches and participants can use the literacy class to discuss how to solve the problems they face.

Going to school in Mubende

Desderio Salongo Walusimbi, aged 60, looks after his seven grandchildren and wants them to get an education. Fifteen year old Nabukenya was taught for a year at a learning centre built by the local community and ActionAid. He did so well he has been able to start attending the nearest primary school. Desderio hopes to send another of his grandsons to the same school this year. He says:

The centre is an encouragement to those of us who built it. Now our dreams have come true!

Livelihoods

A typical family in rural Uganda will have six children and some as many as ten. Nearly all the families ActionAid is working with depend on subsistence farming and often families have very little land to farm.

Late or early rains can cause serious problems for farmers, as a mis-timed planting season can cause a poor harvest. Low incomes make it very difficult for farmers to invest in their farms to improve techniques or buy better tools or fertilisers.



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What people eat

Subsistence farmers eat what they can grow on their own land. Common crops, which form the staple diet, include matoke (green bananas), sweet potatoes, cassava and maize. These are usually eaten with green vegetables, beans and groundnuts. The majority of families can only afford meat and fish in small amounts, on rare occasions. Coffee is grown in some areas as a cash crop and when the harvest has been good, any food crops the family doesn't need are traded on local markets to raise income.

Improving farming methods is the key to making sure that the families we work with have enough to eat all year round and extra produce to sell in order to earn income for basic household needs. ActionAid is working with farmers in all areas to help find ways of tackling problems like infertile soil or crop diseases.

ActionAid trains farmers in techniques which enrich the soil and increase the harvest with high yield seeds, organic fertiliser and good quality manure. Since land for arable farming is scarce, ActionAid also works with farmers on other income raising activities such as raising chickens and goats.

In addition to farming, many families earn income through trading goods with other villagers or in local markets. ActionAid is helping villagers to develop the skills needed to produce goods locally, such as bricks for house building, basketware or pottery. ActionAid supports schemes run by local people which provide affordable bank loans and credit to those (usually women) who have barely enough to survive.

Thanks to the generosity of our supporters, ActionAid is able to do so much to improve the lives of some of the world's poorest families. Since 1972, we have helped millions of people throughout the world, giving them the chance to enjoy a healthier, happier and more dignified future. Uganda is one of over 40 countries where we work.

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