

# Girls' Education & Protection: *Bundibugyo Charity Walk*

**F**or numerous reasons, few girls in Bundibugyo District finish primary school. Girls are vulnerable to unwanted pregnancy, early marriage, violence, leaving school early, and HIV infection. To catalyze local action to protect girls and keep them in school, the UPHOLD Regional Director in Rwenzori Region, Alice Mundaka, mobilized partners to organize a Charity Walk for Girls to coincide with World AIDS Day 2004. The theme of World AIDS Day, *Women and Girls: Have you Heard Me Today?*, spoke directly to district needs and fit well with the Charity Walk.

Prior to the Walk, USAID, through the JSI/UPHOLD Project, organized a contest between primary school children to write stories and songs about brave girls who stay in school despite the obstacles. In addition, UPHOLD supported girls to talk about their experiences on local radio stations. Local drama troupes mobilized participation in the Walk on the eve of the event with songs and plays about HIV/AIDS and girl child education and the development of Bundibugyo District. Groups of partners, including girls, walked five kilometres with banners and t-shirts to excite people about the issue. When the groups converged at the centre of town, leaders, including a Senior Woman Superintendent of Police in charge of children's affairs, called communities and individuals to protect girls, and the winners of story and song contests were recognized. A brass band entertained participants. In addition, UPHOLD announced a contest for communities and schools to develop and implement action plans to protect girls and keep them in school.

Stories that follow highlight experiences and voices of people who participated in the Walk.



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# Girls

Eva Mbambu [14], Butukuru Primary School, with her son Gabriel Baluku, [1]

I was happy that I had the chance to speak on the radio about my experiences. I have shared my experiences with people in my school. I tell girls to stop involving themselves in sex at a young age. I myself went through the same experience, and I don't want them to go through a caesarean birth like I did because it is not a healthy thing. But I was lucky because my mother was very supportive. Most parents are not as supportive.

Parents also have to start taking responsibility for their children. If they don't look after their own children, the children on their own will find a way to get pregnant and a lot of bad diseases. I know that at times you get involved in sexual activities with different people, and you don't know their HIV/AIDS status. By the time you think about what you are doing, you may be HIV-infected. Parents and head teachers should know that they should allow girls who have given birth back in school, because we value education.

I appreciate the efforts of organisations like USAID, UPHOLD and Bundibudgyo Parents Initiative Organisation (BUPIO) for organising this walk. I am happy that I will have an opportunity to have an audience to listen to me and that members of my community will be walking with me to show their support.



Two girls, 16-18 years

I am grateful to be here today to get information on education, because I didn't get the chance of an education myself because no one thinks that a girl going to school is very important, and I know that if you are not going to school you are missing out on a lot.

Now we know that parents are hearing the messages, we hope that parents will bring their children to school.

*'It's a good thing that we can come out and sensitise people because girl child education here is not considered a priority.'*

Immatriat and Sharon, Bundibudgyo Parents School

Dear girls, why should we die from AIDS?

Let us look forward! HIV damages the body. AIDS is transmitted through having sex with infected persons, from mother to child and by sharing sharp instruments.

I advise you girls to be assertive and say no to sex, abstain and choose to delay sex until marriage.

Let us join hands and fight HIV and AIDS.



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# Adults

## **Jessica Master, Teacher, Butukuru Primary School**

We are protecting the rights of children. We want to encourage people who married while still young to come back to school. We want to empower them to come towards us.

We have some children with problems at Butukuru. When we see them, we try to encourage them and give them advice to make good decisions now for their future development. We are in a struggle to educate young people so that those with initiative help and educate each other.



*'We are able to help Bundibugyo district better because we are united.'*

## **Nshabiirwe Esau, District Education Officer (DEO), Bundibugyo District**

I have been in this job for about three months. My job is to organise the education and sports activities in Bundibugyo District. The partnership we have seen today has to continue because we need to support communities on issues relating to the girl child. We want this partnership to be bought into by other partner organisations. Activities such as the radio programmes need to continue, but in a variety of languages, so that parents, teachers and pupils can know their roles in ensuring the sustainability of this programme.

We have a big problem with defilement here in Bundibugyo district. Previously there was laxity from politicians and also in courts. Many negotiations would take place outside of court. Police would try to follow up on evidence, but families often didn't appear and the case would be dismissed. We need the continuity in sensitisation to ensure that people can be assertive.

## **Muhindo Dorothy, BAWILA Bundibugyo Association of Women Living With HIV/AIDS**

Today we are celebrating our rights as people living with AIDS. The place has been colourful, and especially we girl children and woman have enjoyed the day. Now I have been empowered in some ways. My feeling of being stigmatised has ceased. Now I feel that being a positive woman is not a crime. One can stay, even live longer with the virus. I for one think this is the fourth year that I have known I am a positive woman. Being a person with AIDS doesn't mean you are abandoned.



# Poetry

## Girl Pupil, Bundibugyo Junior and Nursery School

Education is essential in advancing Uganda.

It is your right.

If you are educated, you can even answer the doctor because you are more confident.

Uganda today is a very competitive place, Education is essential.

Tell your community that education helps people to think in an organised way and to plan their lives.

A person with basic education can do many things, including read posters, know how to use banks and learn how to communicate in English. People who cannot read, write or manage numbers are easily exploited. They cannot read and learn to attend meetings; they miss vital information. They cannot understand the writing on bottles of agricultural chemicals.

Education, education, education!

Education is knowledge, knowledge is wealth, and wealth is power. Parents, share this valuable treasure called education with your children

Education, education, education!

Education is the backbone of life. Parents, give us education to shape our future. Condemn the culture of forcing us into early marriages: give us a future.

Law enforcement officers at all levels, don't tread on us when we are defiled. Let defilers be condemned publicly.

Education, education, education!

Teachers why do you marry your own children when you are supposed to look after them? Teachers why do you facilitate cheating on examinations? Look in 2001: we got 67 grade ones. In 2002 we got 4 as opposed to over 300 grade ones in our neighbouring districts.

Parents, why tread on a girl child. It's unfair. Don't let them leave you by not paying for our education. Allow girls to complete their education.

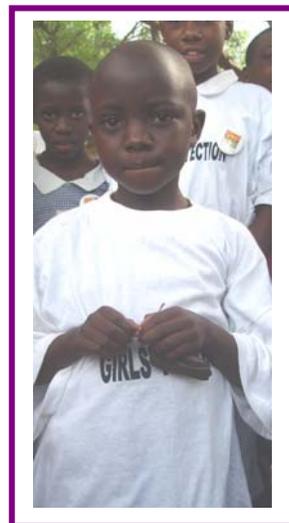
Bravo NGOs!

Bravo UPE programme!

Bravo private sector!

Bravo Bundibugyo Junior and Nursery School!

For God and my country!



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