

Community Involvement in Education: Making Primary Schools in Uganda Safer

Pupils and teachers of Kakabala Primary School in Luwero District have transformed their school environment. In 2005, they adopted a Safe School Contract (SSC) an initiative, introduced by the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) through the USAID-funded UPHOLD Project. The Contract aims to create a safe school environment where pupils can concentrate on learning and not fear for their safety. It includes a reminder of the Teachers' Code of Conduct, call for greater safety of pupils through 'safety friends' with whom they can walk wherever they are going.



A group of girls move together as they leave school.-Luwero district.

At Kakabala School, teachers and pupils signed the SSC after discussing the concept of safety and agreeing that it is the collective responsibility of both teachers and pupils. All 10 teachers and more than 100 pupils signed during an assembly. They posted it in a visible place to serve as a daily reminder of their promise to promote and enforce safety.

Teachers renewed their vows to adhere to the Code of Conduct. Specifically, they agreed to:

- *Call pupils for discussions or work in pairs or small groups (except in the case of individual counselling)*
- *Protect pupils from all forms of abuse, including sexual abuse and corporal punishment*
- *Lead by example to pupils, fellow teachers, parents and communities*

Each pupil selected three to four 'safety friends'. 'Safety friends' promised to look out for each other in and out of school. For example, they accompany their friends if she or he is called by a teacher after class and walk to and from school together. They also developed a new system for reporting safety concerns at school with no fear of consequences.

According to Mr. Patrick Kasajja, Head Teacher of Kakabala Primary School, adoption of the Contract was a very significant activity because *"it has helped change behaviour within teachers and children. The word safety brought the whole essence out. It is a broader perspective to include conditions in classrooms, the compound and latrines."*

Pupils have experienced profound changes. They have explained that the feeling of safety and teamwork at their school has improved. As 14-year-old Esther Nalusenke shared, "When I am talking to teachers these days, I feel safer because I always have a friend with me. Most of us used to fear approaching male teachers, but now we do not since we do it in pairs. The friends I chose also help me through social and class problems in and out of school we are proud of wearing our safety badges with message that- ***I help to protect my self and my friends-I am a safety friend.***"

Florence Nakayise who is 13 years old experiences similar support as she noted, *"I found safety friends whom I ask to escort me whenever I have to go to a teacher's home. These friends know whatever is wrong if I am not able to come to school."*

Girls report other positive changes as well, including less harassment by boy pupils and reduced assaults during sports seasons when pupils travel between schools for competitions. Pupils feel more empowered because they realized that like teachers, they can help make their school safer by looking out for each other.



Boys too need protection -They are proud with their safety friend badges

