

# Bringing Us Closer: *To Quality Learning through Community Involvement*

In partnership with schools, parents and pupils, USAID through UPHOLD, explored realistic ways to reduce pupils' hunger during the school day. The majority of pupils said that they do not eat during school; as a result, hunger limits their ability to concentrate and participate in class. Parents acknowledged the problem, but most were not willing or able to send children with packed lunches or money to purchase lunch at school. Those children who did pack lunches brought foods packed the day before after the late afternoon meal. Although schools allowed pupils to go home for lunch, they would not be able to return in time for afternoon classes. To compound the issue, older pupils were unwilling to bring a packed lunch; they would rather 'withstand the hunger' than feel embarrassed in front of classmates. Some pupils who did bring food left it in a tree or bush away from the school so other pupils would not see.

Moderated discussions between schools, School Management Committee (SMC) and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members, other parents and pupils explored options to ensure that pupils eat food during the school day. Together schools and community members talked through possibilities including jointly preparing food at school, reducing charges for lunch at school if already available, encouraging parents to give children small amounts of money to buy snacks at school, and encouraging parents to pack snacks to bring to school that would be cheap and not spoil, such as groundnuts, roasted cassava and fruits.

Several schools, including Kaiho Primary School in Mbarara District, opted to encourage parents to send children with snacks. After several weeks, more pupils reported bringing snacks including roasted groundnuts, maize, cassava and potatoes.

Other schools decided to prepare lunches at school. When schools and communities negotiated reduced costs of lunches, parents were willing to contribute.

Most pupils of Bongova Primary School in Arua District went all day without eating.

After a lively negotiation between school management, PTA/SMC, and pupils, PTA members agreed to talk to parents about the importance of providing lunch and to ask for 1,000 shillings or the equivalent of dried maize for porridge to be prepared at school.

During the PTA meeting, parents agreed to contribute a small amount for school lunches. Many parents were so enthusiastic about the plan that they contributed the money on the spot to demonstrate their commitment.

Now, pupils get food to help them participate in class and perform better throughout the school day.



*"Before some of us were not carrying food. So now that we carry food, we get into class in time after lunch. Because if we go home for lunch we would not find food ready."* Pupil, Biharwe Primary School, Mbarara

UPHOLD will assist other schools to involve parents in negotiations on school lunches and other topics such as girls' retention and protection, monitoring classrooms, hygiene and sanitation and others, to help children learn well.



**USAID**  
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

