



## **Parish Orphans Care Associations**

# **POCAs**

**A community-based response to HIV/AIDS impact on households in  
ACORD Program Area, Mbarara District\*, Uganda**

A HASAP Publication, July 2006

*\* This Publication is based on an Evaluation of POCAs in the new Isingiro District, which was recently carved out of Mbarara District.*

**Cover photo:** Gibson N; an orphan aged 14 years is the head of the household of six members. He is determined to look after his young siblings in spite of the challenges and hardships. He just needs a push.

# Acronyms

AAMP	Area Based Agricultural Modernization Program
ACORD	Agency for Co-Operation and Research in Development
ASF	AIDS Support Fund
CBO	Community Based Organization
CCS	Centre for Community Solidarity
CHAI	Community HIV/AIDS Initiative
HASAP	HIV and AIDS Support and Advocacy Program
IGAs	Income Generating Activities
LC	Local Council
MoLG	Ministry of Local Government
OVC	Orphans and other Vulnerable Children
POCA	Parish Orphans Care Association
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats
UNICEF	United Nations Children Education Fund
USE	Universal Secondary Education





# POCAS

# Foreword

Today Uganda has been heralded as one of the world's earliest and most compelling AIDS prevention success stories due to its unprecedented HIV prevalence decline from 28% in 1992 to 6.4% in 2006. This success story is largely in relation to prevention as most people living with HIV and AIDS have relied on care and support from their families and community members. But with the ever increasing incidence of the epidemic, the ability of the community and family to provide the needed care and support is gradually being weakened. Currently, some analysts refer to the community as; "a safety net with holes". Yet, organized community groups are limited in time, skills as well as finances to be able to provide holistic care, treatment and support for the infected and affected people and their families.

The above notwithstanding, the community (–the family, the household) remains a major focal and entry point for agencies engaged in HIV and AIDS initiatives. This is in view of the changing focus of agencies from considering HIV and AIDS as a purely health to a broader development issue. To a big extent, community based initiatives are playing an invaluable role, particularly in complementing services provided by other actors such as government, Faith Based Organizations, civil society organizations and the private sector. ACORD has been at the center of supporting community-based initiatives to address the impacts of HIV and AIDS especially at the household level.

Therefore, from its experience in working with marginalized communities in Sub Saharan Africa, ACORD emphasizes the important role communities play in countering situations affecting their welfare. With regard to HIV and AIDS ACORD has strengthened community initiatives in some of its areas of operation to respond to the epidemic's impact on households and entire communities. Some of the strategies used focus on building local community capacity to effectively analyze understand and challenge the factors that contribute to the spread of HIV as well as mitigating its impact on individuals and families.

In Isingiro District, which until recently was part of Mbarara District, Uganda ACORD supported 18 community initiated groups referred to as Parish Orphans' Carers Associations (POCAs) to provide care and support for



widows and orphans of HIV and AIDS. ACORD phased out its support in 2003 when POCAs exhibited all the characteristics of maturity and 2006 ACORD commissioned an external Consultancy to evaluate and investigate the extent to which POCAs had sustained the activities aimed at improving the welfare of widows and orphans. The Final Evaluation Report came out with exciting findings—pointing to positive changes in the lives of orphans and their carers and indeed for affected households, and also recording a 90% survival rate of POCAs i.e., only 2 out of 18 POCAs had collapsed at the time of the evaluation.

This Publication is a synthesis and compilation of the Evaluation Findings, and has been prepared to put together the experiences of working through community-based initiatives to address HIV/AIDS impact on the household level. I must reiterate and emphasize that this initiative was supported by ACORD as a learning process in very difficult conditions of limited resources, but amidst a big problem of uncared orphans. Therefore, what appears in this locally supported initiative as a gap or a limitation should serve as a learning point and an advocacy tool. In the same vein, where the good practices have been documented should guide other stakeholders to replicate or adapt a similar initiative in poorly resourced communities, but which are hard hit by HIV and AIDS epidemic.

**DENNIS NDUHURA**  
**HASAP Manager**

# Acknowledgements

ACORD in a special way is indebted to the Consultant, Asingwire Narathius, a Senior Lecturer and Head of Department of Social Work and Social Administration, Makerere University who led a team of researchers that carried out the final Evaluation of the POCA's that culminated into the production of this publication, and his great contribution in producing this Publication.

With heartfelt gratitude, ACORD wishes to thank all the study participants for providing valuable information voluntarily during the Evaluation exercise. In particular the orphans and widows who participated in the group discussions and key informants at the district, sub-county and the village level are greatly acknowledged for their co-operation in providing the vital information that the Consultants used to compile the evaluation report and subsequently this Publication.

Lastly, but not the least, ACORD is very grateful to SIDA and Cordaid Netherlands for providing the financial resources for the study and publication.



*An evaluation team with some members of Ruanga, POCA.*



# POCAS

# Table of Contents

<b>Acronyms</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Foreword</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>11</b>
<b>1.0 Introduction and Profiles of POCAs</b> .....	<b>13</b>
1.1 Introduction .....	13
1.2 Purpose and Objectives of this Publication .....	14
1.3 Methods .....	14
1.4 Profile of Parish Orphans' Care Associations .....	15
<b>2.0 External Support to POCAs and Initiatives for Orphan Care</b> ..	<b>19</b>
2.1 ACORD Support .....	19
2.2 Other Sources and Types of Support to Community Initiatives for Orphan Care .....	20
2.3 Relevancy of External Support to Orphan Care .....	20
<b>3.0 Involvement of Orphans in Community Initiatives for Orphan Care</b> .....	<b>25</b>
3.1 Orphans' Involvement in Planning .....	25
3.2 Orphans' Involvement in Implementation .....	25
3.3 Orphans' Involvement in Monitoring .....	28
<b>4.0 Role of Community Leaders, POCAs Swot Analysis and Sustainability Issues</b> .....	<b>29</b>
4.1 Role of Community Leaders .....	29
4.2 A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) Analysis of POCAs .....	31





4.3	Sustainability of Community Initiatives for Care and Support of Orphans .....	32
<b>5.0</b>	<b>Conclusion, Key Lessons and Recommendations.....</b>	<b>35</b>
5.1	Conclusion .....	35
5.2	Key Lessons .....	35
5.3	Recommendations .....	37
	<b>References .....</b>	<b>39</b>

## Abstract

In order to support people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, ACORD established an AIDS Support Desk as well as an AIDS Support Fund (ASF) in the 1990s, which had two major areas of focus; namely accessing support to carers of orphans, and starting up simple appropriate innovations/technologies to help people affected by HIV/AIDS. Under the ASF support, HIV/AIDS affected persons were helped as individuals, but this had shortfalls and constraints. Appreciating the limitations of supporting individuals, ACORD encouraged the individual beneficiaries to form groups—marking the formation of 18 Parish Orphans Care Associations (POCAs) in the then Isingiro County now Isingiro District curved out of Mbarara District.

ACORD in 2003 passed over to the POCAs a loan fund for self-management (approximately i.e., Ug. Shs 28 million) before it phased out its support. By the end of 2004, the total POCA loan fund had almost doubled to approximately Ug. Shs 53 million and further rose to around Ug.shs 65 million by the close of 2005. Apart from financial support, ACORD provided technical support to the POCAs in form of training, mentoring and monitoring. Other sources of external support to POCAs came from UNICEF in form of goats; the Area Based Agricultural Modernization Program also provided a few goats and the Centre for Community Solidarity which gave pigs to some POCAs. However, apart from ACORD, the external help to POCAs has been rather negligible and ad hoc.

Although the involvement of orphans in planning of POCA activities as well as that of local leaders is not forthcoming, the situation on the ground point to improved welfare of orphans as a result of POCAs activities. Increased numbers of orphans whose carers are POCA members are largely having their basic needs met; education, food, shelter, medical care etc., which was largely not the case before ACORD extended loan support to POCAs. It has to be noted that all POCAs largely support orphans of member households leaving a large number of orphans outside this care system. There are a lot more orphans in the communities where the POCAs are active, yet the main beneficiaries of the POCA support are the orphans of POCA member households, but still face challenges. The most frequently mentioned challenge across all POCAs visited was paying for secondary education for the orphans.

Three years after weaning (i.e., since 2003), only 2 POCA's have collapsed in terms of looking after the welfare of orphans. This is a high success rate of community initiatives; it also indicates that the POCA's have been well grounded and prepared for the challenges of managing community initiatives for orphan care. All POCA's profoundly appreciate ACORD's support in helping them look after the orphans; demonstrating that if well managed and focused; POCA's are a beacon of hope for the orphans.

# 1.0 Introduction and Profiles of POCAs

## 1.1 Introduction

Since the onset of HIV/AIDS in the early eighties, most people living with HIV/AIDS (PHAs) have relied on care and support from their families and community members. NGOs and CBOs which have particularly come to the rescue of communities affected by the epidemic have used families as entry points. The epidemic has claimed many lives and orphaned many children consequently increasing the burden of care on the extended family system in sub-Saharan Africa. For instance, in Uganda it is estimated that over 1.7 million children have been orphaned by HIV/AIDS yet the ability of the community and family to provide the needed care and support is greatly being eroded. Despite the weakened capacity, the extended family system still acts as a "shock-absorber" to whom the orphans turn for care and support. However, some analysts currently refer to the community as; "a safety net with holes". Yet, organized community groups are limited in time, skills as well as finances to be able to provide holistic care, treatment and support for the infected and affected people and their families.

The above notwithstanding, the community<sup>1</sup> remains a major focal and entry point for agencies engaged in HIV/AIDS initiatives. To a big extent, community based initiatives are playing an invaluable role, particularly in complementing services provided by other actors such as government, Faith Based Organizations (FBOs), civil society organizations such as ACORD and the private sector. ACORD recognizes this vital role communities are playing. From its experience in working with marginalized communities in sub-Saharan Africa, ACORD emphasizes the important role communities play in countering situations affecting their welfare. In some of its areas of operation like Mbarara, ACORD has worked with community initiated groups referred to as Parish Orphans' Carers Associations (POCAs) to provide care and support for widows and orphans of HIV/AIDS. Whereas these communities' led initiatives are in place it would be important for programmatic purposes to establish whether these initiatives are the best effective option; "beacon of hope for the ever increasing number of HIV/AIDS related orphans and vulnerable children". It was against this background that ACORD commissioned this study.

1 - The family, households, both formal and informal groups and organizations at local community level, within work places or in homes, which work exclusively on HIV/AIDS issues as well as those involved in general development work

A community-based response to HIV/AIDS impact on households in ACORD Program Area, Mbarara District\*, Uganda



## 1.2 Purpose and Objectives of this Publication

The purpose of this publication is to aid ACORD and partners with tools on how to engage and work with communities to identify the needs of OVCs and develop effective responses to address the negative impact of HIV/AIDS on children especially the orphans and others made vulnerable by the epidemic. This Publication, which is a synthesis of the Evaluation Report (June, 2006) of POCA is intended to facilitate stakeholders to undertake advocacy at both local and international levels for genuine community participation in responses to HIV/AIDS. Related with this purpose is the overall objective of this Publication, which is to provide a summarized analysis and documentation of experiences of community initiatives in responding to the impact of HIV/AIDS epidemic on households and communities so as to inform both policy and practice for all stakeholders involved in implementing interventions at community level. Arising from the purpose and overall objective of this Publication are the specific objectives, which are:

- To provide a synthesis of the nature and magnitude of the external support provided in different initiatives by various actors that benefit the orphans, and factors that contribute to successful community initiatives for providing care and support for orphans.
- To document the constraints that hinder effective implementation of community initiatives for providing care and support to orphans, and the involvement by orphans in the planning, implementation and monitoring of community initiatives in providing services
- To provide a synthesis of the role played by community leaders/local councils in the care and support of orphans, and an analysis of the capacity of community to sustain initiatives for care and support of orphans.

## 1.3 Methods

This Publication was produced by undertaking a desk review mainly the Final Evaluation of the POCA and related sources. The Evaluation Report from which this Publication is derived was conducted in the new district of Isingiro (formerly part of Mbarara district), which is one of ACORD's operation areas in Uganda. The study covered 11 POCA out of the documented 16 that were active; representing almost 70% coverage of all the existing POCA. The primary study participants were widows and orphans who are direct

beneficiaries of POCAs. Other study participants were key informants who included district and community leaders such as Local Council V Chairman, Local Council (LC I-III) leaders and ACORD staff.



Members of Ngarama Tuyambe Kureberera Efuuzi

Selected qualitative techniques of data collection were used in during the Evaluation; focus group discussions (FGDs)/ group interviews (GIs), key informant interviews (KIIs), real life case studies/oral testimonies, direct observations and desk review.

## 1.4 Profile of Parish Orphans' Care Associations

Evolution of POCAs:-As a way of supporting people infected and affected by HIV/AIDS, ACORD established an AIDS Support Desk as well as an AIDS Support Fund (ASF) in the 1990s, which had two major areas of focus namely accessing support to carers of orphans, and starting up simple appropriate innovations/technologies especially to help people affected by HIV/AIDS in particular those succumbing to HIV/AIDS related illnesses. The innovations mostly included support to zero-grazing, fuel saving stoves, donkeys etc.

Under the ASF support, HIV/AIDS affected persons were helped as individuals, but this came with shortfalls and constraints, and hence ACORD had to encourage the individual beneficiaries to form groups. This marked the beginning of POCAs in the then Isingiro County in 18 parishes in the sub-counties of Kikagati, Nyakitunda, Ngarama and Kabingo with generally common functions. The original functions of the POCAs were, among others, to provide a forum for the carers through which they could exchange ideas, share problems and experiences, to help identify bonafide beneficiaries for the loan fund (each village was represented on the management committee), to put to proper use ACORD's loan fund and reduce on defaulting rate, to pool savings together and supplement the loan fund through internal lending, to enable ACORD deal with carers as an entity rather than individuals, and to provide for sustainability of the loan fund in the post-ACORD period.

The initial capacity building activities for POCAs by ACORD involved organization and facilitating of training for POCA members. The training covered areas such as group dynamics, saving skills, basic book keeping, small business management, small group management and operation including drafting group constitutions and bye-laws. After the training, ACORD supported the groups with soft loans attracting a modest interest of 2% as opposed to free-interest loans, which individual beneficiaries used to get.

Five Pilot POCA; Kamuri, Ngarama, Kabare, Kaharo and Mabona in 1997 received loans from ACORD. More POCA were formed in 1998 and received loans accruing from the repayments of the five Pilot POCA. By 2001, 18 POCA had been formed with a membership of 500. Of the 18 POCA 16 were active<sup>2</sup>; the two i.e., Burungamo and Kamuri disintegrated due to mismanagement and failure to appreciate the cardinal principle upon which they were formed; voluntary community initiatives for the care of orphans.

Organization Structure of POCA:-All the active POCA were found with an organizational structure comprising of a Chairperson, Vice Chairperson, Secretary, Vice Secretary, a Treasurer and at least five Committee Members. POCA are governed by Constitutions and a number of bye-laws, which vary from one POCA to another. Selection of a committee is usually through an Annual General Assembly. Some POCA's executive committee term is for two years while others go for three years. They hold monthly meetings during which they bring their monthly contributions and service their loans. Most of the committees comprise of both men and women caring for orphans. The committees are charged, among others, monitoring members' IGAs to ensure repayment, keeping records of the association, and ensuring that members do not default.

**POCA Membership:-**The main criterion for membership is presence of an orphan in the household. Each POCA member represents a household rather than an individual orphan. The POCA definition of an orphan differs from the commonly held version that is based on number of completed years; an orphan being a person below 18 years who has lost one or both parents (UDHS, 2001) or a person below 15 years who has lost one or both parents (Wakhweya et al, 2002). According to POCA members, as long as the person, who has lost either or both parents, is under the care of a guardian, s/he is considered an orphan regardless of the age.

Majority of POCA members are women who are either widows or elderly grandmothers. Cases of widowers looking for orphans are quite rare, for

2 At the time of the Evaluation

most men tend to remarry once they lose their partners as opposed to women. The few men found caring for orphans were elderly grandfathers. With regard to stability of POCA, with the exception of a few (i.e., Kabare Tuyambe Efuuzi), majority of POCA's membership has been very stable. Kabare Tuyambe Efuuzi has overtime lost members due to either death, lack of interest in the POCA activities, failure to honor loan obligations<sup>3</sup> leading to deliberate absenteeism, long distance making it difficult to attend meetings or re-location to other districts.

POCA IGAs: -All the POCA's have at least the money equivalent to the ACORD grants extended to them. ACORD gave a grant of 2,100,000= to almost each of the POCA's. Five POCA's own plots of land; some like Kamubeizi have started constructing temporary structures to house the POCA offices as well as create room for operating a shop. Kamubeizi presents an example of a successful POCA both in terms of caring for orphans and making profit out of the grant from ACORD. It has encouraged and facilitated the formation of two other POCA's in the sub-county. This POCA is managing to succeed partly due to a strong and transparent leadership, convening regular committee meetings and providing continued feedback to the rest of the POCA members, a strong sense of solidarity among POCA members, and a common perception of a community problem as everybody's problem.

Apart from petty trading e.g., small grocery shops/kiosks, majority of POCA members are involved in agriculture and animal husbandry. Some are involved in seasonal businesses like selling produce while others operate small bars. Animal husbandry is mainly in form of rearing of goats with a few members rearing bulls and selling them at a profit after a few months. Other animals kept for purposes of earning income are pigs. Overall, only 2 out of the original 18 POCA's have been unsuccessful, the rest have multiplied their savings and acquired assets including land.

---

3 In case of default, a member's savings with the group compensates for the loan taken/defaulted on





## 2.0 External Support to Pocas and Initiatives for Orphan Care

### 2.1 ACORD Support

All POCAs were formed as a result of ACORD's deliberate initiative of helping communities with community-based interventions to address the impact of HIV and AIDS on the household. As a result, ACORD has been a single dominant external source of support to POCAs. ACORD support was extended to POCAs in mainly two ways; (i) direct financial support and, (ii) technical support to enable the POCAs manage the financial support received better.

**Financial support:-** A loan fund for self-management of the POCAs in varying proportions was extended in February 2003 totaling Ug.Shs28,241,571/=<sup>4</sup>. Majority POCAs received 2,100,000=, which formed the basis of the revolving loan fund that the POCAs give their individual members. Recipient POCAs were required to open a bank account on which the money was deposited and managed. By the end of 2004, the total POCA loan fund had almost doubled from 28,241,571= in 2003 to 53,043,400= and further rose to 65,773,816= by the close of 2005. Internally, the POCAs manage the loans and monitor members' IGAs to ensure high repayment rates. Before 2003 when the loan fund was managed by ACORD, the group would assess the individual applicant for the loan and after being satisfied that the applicant would pay back the loan, the respective POCA recommended him/her to ACORD. Even after ACORD phased out, the rules governing administration of the loans have hardly changed.

**Technical support:-**POCAs received training from ACORD in savings skills, small business management skills and orphan care; resource mobilization, project planning and implementation, monitoring and evaluation book keeping, group dynamics, and group constitution making. The support was intended to strengthen POCA leadership to take over functions formerly under ACORD including registration of orphans, loan approval, monitoring of loan usage and loan recovery. All POCAs as a result exhibit evidence of good book keeping; they also had record of minutes of their meetings, updated registers of their members and the number of orphans supported. POCAs also displayed records of their businesses, mainly those given loans and tracking of how they repay, as well as records of monthly contributions.

4 1 US \$ = Ug. Shs 1800/=

Several POCAs have written proposals requesting for funding, although they are yet to get feedback. Despite delayed or no feedback, it is clear that the POCAs grasped what was taught, and are using that knowledge and skill to strengthen their groups.

UNICEF supported goat pass on project:-Through ACORD, UNICEF gave the POCAs money to procure goats. The first round of 160 goats and 8 exotic boar he-goats was given out in 2000, the second batch of 90 goats was given out in 2003, and the last batch was given out in July 2004. The POCAs have been instrumental in managing the UNICEF goat passed on project. They registered the eligible beneficiaries, set guidelines for managing the project, received funds, purchased goats and distributed them.

## 2.2 Other Sources and Types of Support to Community Initiatives for Orphan Care

Encouraged by POCAs performance as a result of ACORD's and UNICEF support, the Area Based Agricultural Modernization Program (AAMP) which is a Government project gave some POCAs 2 goats each as well as iron sheets for the goats' shelter. Another source of support was Centre for Community Solidarity (CCS) which gave out pigs, although this targeted widows in general. Further support in form of training in basic project management skills including proposal writing to the POCAs was extended by the Community HIV/AIDS Initiative (CHAI) project.

## 2.3 Relevancy of External Support to Orphan Care

POCAs receive external support collectively as a group, it is used by individual households with an orphan and the support benefits the entire household where the orphan lives. The support/loans have led to significant improvement in welfare of orphans including feeding/food security and schooling. Some POCA members use the loan money to finance their recurrent expenditure but mainly related to schooling of orphans or funding one-time big expenditures such as construction of shelter for the household. Although majority use the money for school fees and buying scholastic materials, others use it for shelter. The underlining benefit here is that whether the members use the money for a short-term paying activity or a long-term one, it constitutes a benefit, an achievement they would have found difficult or in the case of building a house, impossible to achieve in their life time, solely.



*An orphan and his Carer standing besides their goats*

POCAs have two accounts for their money; one in the bank and which finances long term investments, and the other which is a “cash account” - money kept by the treasurer mainly for solving short term/abrupt, small financial needs e.g., buying scholastic

materials, school uniform, school fees-for secondary school going orphans and medical care. Majority of the orphans with carers in POCAs are going to school; out of a total of 609 orphans from the six POCAs, 571 are in school, which is 94% school enrollment rate. Majority of those going to school are in primary level (473), few in secondary schools (66) and a much smaller figure in vocational skills training institutions (31). Vocational skills' training is mostly in tailoring and carpentry. It is worthy noting that a few POCAs do not focus on only uplifting the welfare of their orphans alone; whenever possible they extend support to other orphans especially child-headed households as the following Case illustrates:

### **Case 1: A Real Life Case Study of an Orphan Child Headed Household**

Nuwarinda Gibson aged 14 is a double orphan with both parents having died a couple of years ago. At 14, he is a head of a family of six; the young siblings (2 boys and 3 girls) aged between 2.5 and 12.5 years. Nuwarida's parents died in Bunyoro where they had migrated with no other relatives. After burying the last parent (mother) a friend to his late father helped in selling the family land and relocated the children to their maternal grandfather's place where they had never been before. Proceeds from the sale of land in Bunyoro were used to buy land for the children in Kikagati near to their grandfather's place. The children started staying with their grandfather and mother.

In their new home, life became unbearable for them; they were subjected to hard tasks and household chores. So they left to go live on their own; they erected a make-shift structure on their land and Nuwarinda assumed responsibilities of household head at 12 years. To cope with the new responsibilities of a household head, Nuwarinda who had reached Primary Four had to drop out of school to start doing casual work where he earns 700/= a day (1US\$=1820/=). He works and attends to family land to grow less labor intensive food crops to feed the family. Nuwarinda also asked his sister who follows him aged 12.5 years old to leave school to look after the youngest sibling aged 2.5 years and cook for the family.

On how he manages, Nuwarinda responds ...”this is very difficult, I try to grow crops such as cassava, potatoes and beans on our land...I also do this for other people in the village to get some little money to buy food for the family and meet other needs for my brothers and sisters going to school—pens, books, uniform. During the holidays we all work together, but at times I have to leave them to go and look for work”. Through the Kamubeizi POCA, Nuwarinda is learning tailoring, with challenges though—“I cannot attend regularly ...otherwise we can starve to death. I have to divide up...attending to family land, looking for work in the village and learning”. On what the future could be, Nuwarinda looks up and keeps quiet for a while and with almost tears in his eyes, he replies, “Mukuru tindamanya habwokuba ensi egumire ... burizooba riraguma okukira erya nyomwebazo” translated as “Sir I don’t know because life is very hard...every other day is more difficult than the previous one”. However, he is determined to look after his young brothers and sisters. He concludes, “I think the future has tremendous problems for me... ”.

Nuwarinda’s experience brings to the fore the problems faced by children raised in child headed households. The POCAs at the same time comprise of adult orphan carers, implying that orphans caring for fellow orphans cannot easily join such groups. It is important therefore that in interventions that take the form of POCAs, the issue of orphan child headed households be addressed as well.

Despite the above gap, it is important to note that there are definite changes that have taken place in the lives of orphans whose guardians are members of POCAs. The guardians' capacity to care for their orphans has been strengthened; and it continues to improve.

However, there are still challenges that the orphan carers have to cope with such as paying for secondary education for the orphans. It can be hoped that the recently announced Universal Secondary Education (USE) to commence in 2007 might offer some temporary relief to orphan carers till after Senior Four. But still, it is not only tuition that is a problem, but other scholastic needs, which poor orphan carers might not meet. It is also worth mentioning that the scope of beneficiaries of POCAs is narrow; there are a lot more orphans in the communities where the POCAs are active, yet the main beneficiaries of the POCA support are the orphans of POCA member households.



*Team Leader of the Evaluation Team shaking hands with Nuwarinda, after the team donated 70,000/= to him for buying a goat and help him meet some of the scholastic needs of his young siblings. Looking on are Kamumbeizi POCA members.*



## 3.0 Involvement of Orphans in Community Initiatives for Orphan Care

### 3.1 Orphans' Involvement in Planning

There is little involvement of orphans in planning of activities, for POCA planning is carried out during monthly meetings, general meetings and executive meetings where they are not invited, unless they attend as observers or proxies, in both cases with less or no decision-making powers. A few exceptional cases where orphans are involved in planning activities of POCA are where there are old and frail carers. In such a case an older orphan can represent the carer. At the household level, there is some level of involvement, for instance, when the orphans are informed of impending activities of the POCA e.g., goats donations, or if the carer is applying for a loan, the orphan is informed and depending on the standing orders of the POCA and the age of the orphan, the orphan is required to sign the application form, as a condition for approval.

### 3.2 Orphans' Involvement in Implementation

Orphan involvement in implementation at the household level is largely dependent on the age and physical ability of the orphans—grazing goats, running a shop etc. For the few initiatives implemented collectively at the POCA level, there is little involvement of orphans in implementation. In a few exceptional cases a POCA supported two orphans to acquire vocational training (tailoring for the girl and carpentry and joinery for the boy), and thereafter took charge of implementing activities. The two trainees with support and encouragement from the POCA are passing on acquired skills to other orphans who are involved in implementation of own activities.



## Case 2: A Girl Orphan Beneficiary of POCA Providing Skills to other Orphans

Twinomujuni Eunice Hope aged 17 years was orphaned when she was 6 years old. Eunice lives with a maternal aunt with four of her siblings. After the death of her parents she started living with her grandparents who educated her up to P.7 in 2002. After P.7 she did not continue to secondary due to lack of school fees, for during primary



*Twinomugisha Eunice Hope; a POCA Trained in Tailoring*

she had benefited under the Universal Primary Education. After P.7, Kamubeizi POCA sponsored her for training in tailoring at Kibaale at a cost of Ug.Shs250,000/= for the entire training. Eunice did not complete her training due to harassment (sexual) from her tutor.

With the little skills, she had acquired, the POCA procured a sewing machine for her to start training other 13 girls cared by the POCA members. At the time of this evaluation, Eunice had been training 13 girls in a rented place (10,000/=) at Nfasha. As the girls train, they also receive some income from what they are doing, and according to Eunice they intend to form an association so that it can outlive an individual member. The girls purchased a plot of land at Nfasha Trading Centre at 2m/= in 2004, and intend to build their own premises on this plot.

Eunice with her group is, however, facing tremendous challenges in their work. These include little money to enable them purchase training materials, food while at work, trainees looking after other orphans and hence without much time to attend the training as they have to attend to other needs, and further training to enable them acquire more knowledge and skills.

**Case 3: Mr. Ayebazibwe, a former beneficiary of POCA, now a POCA Member—from a situation of hopelessness to one of hope and promising.**

Mr. Ayebazibwe aged 25 and married with one kid is a former beneficiary of Kamubeizi POCA. Ayebazibwe whose Aunt is a member of the Kamubeiz POCA assisted him in getting enrolled in the POCA, to get some support to supplement his individual effort. Ayebazibwe grew up a double orphan, with two sisters. On death of the parents, Ayebazibwe supplemented the help extended by doing casual work on weekends and holidays. He managed to complete P.7, but could not continue to secondary. After P.7, the POCA sponsored him for a carpentry and joinery course at Kyezimbire Technical Institute. The challenge however was commuting daily for 3 years from his home in Kamubeizi to Kyezimbire (It is a long distance). He commuted due to; one, lack of money to pay boarding fees, but more fundamentally because of responsibility, "if I had become a resident at the institute my young sisters would have suffered...still I had to look after them since they could not look after themselves"



*From a situation of hopelessness to hope; once a total orphan, Mr. Ayebazibwe, was helped by Kamubeizi POCA to become a carpenter, get a wife, care for his siblings and train other orphans in the community.*

Upon completion of the course, Ayebazibwe was helped by a relative to procure some basic tools and hired a working place at Nfasha Trading Centre where he pays Ug.Shs5,000/= per month. He is now training other 7 orphans in carpentry and joinery. He earns between 50,000/= and 60,000/= per month, and spends about half of it on materials. As he trains the orphans, he also gives them subsistence allowance, but still faces lots of challenges, "We do not have adequate equipment for training and use...I only have one plane, which is used by the whole group; I lack money for buying training materials such as timber and many others".

### 3.3 Orphans' Involvement in Monitoring

Orphans participate in loan application; they sign the forms before the loan is given, they are also actively involved in the goat pass-on project, and are consulted before selling the goat and proceeds used to meet orphan needs. However, in as much as orphans are involved in POCA activities, their involvement is undermined by the fact that it is an individual affair restricted to the household level, not a collective activity like their carers who meet at POCA level. It must be noted that orphans under the care of a particular POCA do not know each other (except those of Ntugu Efakazi Twimukye who have a drama and music club and perform collective activities

Overall, there is limited involvement of orphans in the POCA activities except the area of monitoring. Even in monitoring they are involved simply because loan application procedures require that an orphan must sign, otherwise they would not be participating. Factors cited responsible for the limited or no involvement of orphans in POCA activities especially planning and implementation include age of the orphan (many are very young), the legal framework also provides one place per household, lack of financial resources to feed orphans during meetings. Individual carers' discretion (willingness of the carer to involve the orphan) is another aspect which was cited. Depending on the age of the orphan and to some extent the standing orders of the POCA, it is upon the carer to pass information to the orphan of the meeting supposed to take place or what transpired in the meeting. The other reason given for the non-involvement of orphans in POCA activities is its potential to isolate and consequently stigmatize the orphans. Active involvement of orphans to the level of forming (even) a loose association of their own under the care of one POCA, can potentially isolate the orphans from the rest of the children, thus clearly marking them out as a target for discrimination and resentment.



*Orphans under Ntugu Efakazi Twimukye in their Drama Group*

# 4.0 Role of Community Leaders, POCAS Swot Analysis and Sustainability Issues

## 4.1 Role of Community Leaders

Policy formulation, enforcement and Coordination:-With the exception of a few instances, the local leadership has not been active in coordination of POCAs activities. Limited participation is partly blamed on the failure by ACORD and the POCAs themselves to provide the leadership with sufficient information regarding their operations; they do not get annual reports from ACORD on the POCAs.

Direct Sub County Support to Orphan Care:-In some very few cases, the sub-county directly supports the orphans. This support is mainly limited to paying for education at secondary school level usually up to S.4. It is only for the bright ones that are supported at S5 and S6. As already indicated, the selection of beneficiaries is not based on those orphans registered in POCAs, although the POCA orphans also qualify and have in certain cases been selected (e.g., in Kihiihi POCA). The selection is based on merit. The central government also has a bursary for 2 orphans from the sub-county for their secondary education-S1 to S4; the central government support is worth 270,000= per annum which works out to 90,000= per term and which is clearly little support. This support is, however, so small compared



An elderly orphan carer, Mzee Eneriko (Ruyanga, Kikagati Sub-county).

to number of children that are ready to start secondary school. Sub county and central government support is intended to pay for secondary education in a day school which limits the beneficiaries to local secondary schools. Sub county support has reportedly been undermined by the abolition of graduated tax.

Local governments that are hosts to the POCAs, are mainly aware of the activities of the POCAs although less of their achievements. Again, sub-county support to orphans is not channeled through POCAs, but follows the local government's own selection criteria. It is worth mentioning that orphans under the care of POCAs also benefit from sub-county support-if they are selected. Finally, the main support that local governments give to POCAs is recognition of their existence and protection against loan defaulters and potential fraudsters.

## 4.2 A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threat (SWOT) Analysis of POCAs

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>The major strength of the POCAs is embedded in their project design; POCAs are not substitutes for the traditional orphan care system but rather supplements.</p> <p>POCAs are cognizant of the Government Policy on orphan care which advocates for community-based approaches to orphans' care and support. So the design of POCAs makes sustainability of initiatives feasible.</p> <p>Reliance on documented rules and procedures to run their activities—all POCAs have a constitution with by-laws governing loan application and use, repayment and observing the cardinal objective of ??</p> <p>Majority of POCAs demonstrate good book keeping and proposal writing skills and hold regular meetings</p> <p>Majority of POCAs have a sound institutional framework with a well laid out leadership structure with clear procedures for change.</p>	<p>The inability of the POCAs to provide care and support to all orphans in the community rather than supporting only orphans of member households—a small fraction of all orphans</p> <p>Loan disbursement is not based on number of orphans in a household—almost all POCA members are entitled to the same amount of the loan money and any other benefits irrespective of the number of orphans one is taking care of.</p> <p>Failure to conduct feasibility studies to ascertain abilities of the POCAs members to undertake promoted initiatives.</p>	<p>Favorable policy environment in the country—government provides free primary school education and recently announced plans for USE</p> <p>Goodwill from donors and other government projects targeting orphan care and support such as AAMP</p>	<p>Tendencies for loan recovery to overshadow the cardinal objectives of POCAs—members sometimes get so engrossed in making sure loans are paid back forgetting uplifting the welfare of the orphans.</p> <p>The cost of education especially secondary school education; the financial base of the POCAs (or size of loan) cannot sustain a secondary school going orphan..</p> <p>Limited opportunities for the orphans to access meaningful employment or put acquired skills to practice after vocational training threatens to shatter the hope which had been brought by the POCAs.</p> <p>Stringent policies governing the POCAs e.g., those restricting entry of new members in already established POCAs can erode the benefits associated with the initiative. This makes POCAs closed and more less like limited companies.</p>

### 4.3 Sustainability of Community Initiatives for Care and Support of Orphans

Financial Sustainability:- There are conditions conditions that can guarantee or are guaranteeing POCA's financial sustainability, which include the following:

- Availability of assets such as land acquired and developed by some POCA's if well utilized can help them meet some of the financial obligations in absence of donor support.
- Some POCA's have made sizeable savings and have active bank accounts, and have compulsory monthly savings on individual member's loan, which provides security and guarantees sustainability of the initiative.
- There are several inbuilt checks which ensure that the borrower really needs the loan, and is able to pay back the amount borrowed.
- Some POCA's have verification teams while others require the next of kin to sign as surety for the borrower.

Institutional Sustainability:-The other factor cited promoting sustainability of POCA's initiatives is their institutional set-up. Almost all the POCA's have functional organizational structures, adequate management systems, devoted members to the associations' cardinal objectives, all have Constitutions with well stipulated rules and regulations, standing orders and by-laws guiding operation. These operational guidelines have fostered continuity and therefore sustainability of the POCA's initiatives.

All POCA's hold regular meetings and keep records including minutes with members being highly committed and devoted to the cardinal objective of the POCA's which is improving the living conditions of orphans under their care.

Other salient membership characteristics and qualities that demonstrate institutional sustainability of POCA's include the following:

- Group concept; carers in the POCA's consider the interests of the group before self as demonstrated by regular payment of their

contributions and loans so as to ensure that POCAs do not collapse. They acknowledge that without the groups, they would never have got the money.

- Dominance of women in leadership of POCAs; widows who hitherto used to suffer with orphans due to loss of land and property on death of their husbands, are now finding solace in these community initiatives. Indeed, women led POCAs are better managed compared to male led ones.
- Presence of able-bodied members/orphan carers; most POCAs have adequate representation of able-bodied members, which ensures efficiency in execution of the POCAs' activities. There are only a few old and frail POCA members. In a few instances of some elderly carers like Mzee Eneriko (see Picture), they have delegated attending meetings to older orphans under their care and manage the loan money accessed.
- Strong cultural linkage; although research on the role of culture in the success of community initiatives for orphan care is inconclusive, anecdotal evidence points to cases of culture fostering stronger group bonding and success. Sub-counties which are predominantly inhabited by the Bakiga ethnic group exhibit high level of group bonding, unity and resolve to succeed.



*A POCA supported 17 year old orphan girl attending Rwampara Farm School*



## 5.0 Conclusion, Key Lessons and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Since 2003 when ACORD phased out support to POCAs, only 2 out of the 18 supported have collapsed. This portrays a high success rate of community initiatives and it also indicates that the POCAs were well grounded and prepared for the challenges of managing the initiatives. The success of the POCAs is partly attributed to good programming and design; POCAs approach to orphan care is cognizant of Government policy of taking care of orphans within their communities as opposed to institutionalization which may lead to isolation and stigmatization. Further, POCA support does not benefit only orphans, but rather the entire household where the orphan lives. This has ensured ownership and therefore success of the initiatives. Findings show that households of POCAs members have experienced significant improvement in welfare of orphans including feeding and schooling. POCAs have provided hope to orphans who were hitherto hopeless and without any skills.

Despite the achievements, the initiative (POCAs) is faced with a number of challenges. Most POCAs are generally limited to supporting only orphans of member households which is a small fraction of all orphans in their respective communities. Therefore POCAs have a small coverage considering the burden of care from orphan in their respective communities and have limited opportunity for child headed households to benefit from their support. Challenges notwithstanding, all POCAs express profound gratitude to ACORD for the support rendered. This appreciation expressed by the orphan carers together with the findings of the Evaluation from which this Publication demonstrate that if well managed and focused, POCAs are beacon of hope for the orphans

### 5.2 Key Lessons

Management and personal interests:- POCAs can be classified into three categories –(i) active POCAs, (ii) POCAs struggling to survive, and (iii) a few that have either disintegrated/collapsed or have changed focus. The common characteristics that have kept POCAs alive or led to disintegration



are management and inherent strong will to remain focused on the objectives of the POCA. The lessons we learn here are threefold:

- Focused training of POCA members in basic managerial issues is central to their survival
- Not all POCA members have genuine interest of caring for orphans, but rather to achieve personal objectives—self-interests
- To minimize consequences of lesson two above, there is need for constant external monitoring and support especially in the early stages of POCA formation

Group Benefits:-By forming groups under the guidance of ACORD, the lessons learnt are:

- Internally, the POCA members manage the loans and monitor members' IGAs to ensure high repayment rates.
- The group serves as the "collateral security" for the individual loans.
- Once groups are formed other agencies find it much easier to extend support to already formed groups rather than getting bogged down in the processes of group formation.

Technical support:-ACORD provided technical support to POCA members in form of training, mentoring and monitoring. POCA members were taught savings skills, small business management skills and orphan care, which they quickly grasped and put to use. Members have utilized the skills acquired and this has helped them to keep the POCA alive. The lessons learnt here are two-fold:

- Community people can be quick learners
- An intervention that entails giving loans must be preceded by focused training of beneficiaries

Destigmatization of orphans:- Orphans are certainly a minority in the community, but a common and usual minority. Through the work of POCA, lessons have been learnt:

- There is a community feeling of appreciation of the fact that any child is a potential orphan, which has conditioned society to relate to orphans with empathy, and children who need extra care.
- Traditional care systems which ACORD sought to strengthen rather than substitute have ensured that orphans are not discriminated against or resented to by the community.

Project feasibility studies:-There are a few instances where beneficiaries with little land received goats, and are feeling the burden of looking after them. The lesson therefore is:

- Any intervention whether at the group level or individual level should be preceded by a proper feasibility study

## 5.3 Recommendations

**Follow-up:** ACORD after phasing out almost lost touch with the POCA, but some of the POCA had been “weaned” a bit prematurely. Resources need to be mobilized to make low key follow-up to give mainly technical support especially in the areas of book keeping knowledge and skills.

**Exchange visits:** As part of low key follow-up, POCA need to visit each other so as to learn and share experiences as well as challenges.

**Involvement of Local Leaders:** Deliberate efforts to involve local leaders need to be embarked on, which will ensure that POCA work for the common good of all the orphans in respective parishes. The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), Isingiro District and Sub-county chiefs need to be targeted in particular.

**Utilization of Sub-county Staff and refresher training:** Under the policy of decentralization, sub-counties have been staffed with qualified personnel. It is very important to utilize such staff in providing refresher training to the old POCA.

**Coverage:** Presently, POCA are benefiting a small fraction of orphans, to widen the care circle; more community mobilization need to be planned such that the ACORD “seed money” becomes a fund for orphans to be used by carers who are organized in groups.

**Greater involvement of orphans in POCA activities:** It is important that orphans who are the primary beneficiaries of such initiatives be involved in the affairs of the POCA as much as possible, the age of the orphan notwithstanding.

**HIV/AIDS Services:** Where ACORD is not in position to provide such services as VCT, which people urgently need to access, it can act as a strong lobby and advocacy group for the POCA. Secondly, people can be linked to service organizations in terms of knowledge provision as to where such service organizations exist.

Secondary education and broadening the concept “vocational” education: As the challenge of secondary education rages on, most carers have opted for vocational education. However, there has been a tendency to narrowly



think of vocational education as meaning carpentry, bricklaying and concrete practice and tailoring. Orphan carers could think of other less common, but useful vocation skills e.g., farming.

Utilization of Sub-county Staff and refresher training: It very important to utilize sub-county staff in providing refresher training to the old POCAs especially in areas of basic management of income generating activities, and fresh training to new POCAs if they were to be formed.

## References

---

Uganda Demographic Health Survey (2001). Kampala, Uganda

Wakhweya, A., Katergga, C., Konde-Lule, J., Mukyala, R., Sabin, L., Williams, M., Heggenhougen, K. (2002). Situation Analysis of Orphans in Uganda, "Orphans and their Households: Caring for the Future Today". Kampala, Uganda.





**KAMPALA OFFICE:**

Plot No. 1272 Ggaba Road,  
Block 15,  
Nsambya  
PO BOX 280  
Kampala  
Uganda

Tel: +256 (41) 267 668/266 596

E mail: [hasap@acord.or.ug](mailto:hasap@acord.or.ug)

---

**LONDON OFFICE**

Development House  
56-64 Leonard Street,  
London EC2A 4JX  
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (207) 065 0850

E mail: [info@acord.org.uk](mailto:info@acord.org.uk)

---

**NAIROBI OFFICE:**

ACK Garden House  
PO Box 61216-00200  
Nairobi  
Kenya

Tel: +254 (20) 2721186/1185

Email: [info@acordnairobi.org](mailto:info@acordnairobi.org)

---

ACORD is a company limited by guarantee  
Company registration no. 1573552

ACORD is a registered charity governed by  
memorandum and articles of association.

UK Registered Charity Number 283302

---

Copyright ACORD 2004

---

ISSN 1812 1276

---

Printed by Visual Effects Limited  
+256 772 601837