



OKERE CITY



ANNUAL REPORT 2019

www.okerecity.org

Overview

Okere Community Development Project (Okere City) is a community development and social enterprise providing a collaborative and holistic ecosystem to promote integrated rural development in Okere parish, Adwari sub-county, Otuke District, Northern Uganda. Okere City project seeks to be an enabler for the rural community in the parish to be more imaginative, cooperative, creative, innovative, and enterprising as pre-requisites to make them more successful and be champions of rural poverty reduction.

Okere City project is registered as a community based organization (CBO) by Otuke District Local Government. Okere City's initiatives are driven by actual community needs and the implementation of project activities are led by community members.



Overall, Okere City strives to be a community organization and social enterprise that creates multiple opportunities for agrarian reforms and rural transformation in Okere Parish by encouraging open and forward thinking, mobilizing, organizing and training the rural populace through a series of innovative projects, activities and techniques so that they can be able to generate practical solutions for their day to day challenges they face.



“We shall rejoice and be glad well knowing that we did all that was within our means to empower our people to exploit many opportunities and realize their fullest potential on the road to economic and social freedom.”



OUR MOTTO

Yamo Akwo Koddo (A living Wind Blows)

OUR VISION

“Creating economically thriving and self-reliant rural households in Okere Parish.”

OUR MISSION

“To work with rural households in Okere Parish as partners to access and create economic and social opportunities that will stimulate catalytic, holistic and sustainable rural development.”

OUR INSPIRATION

“That in years to come, our rural transformative journey will be a lesson to the whole world because we took a leap of faith, risked and invested in our people because from the beginning, we knew it was the only way out of the poverty trap that enmeshed us; And that when we look back at that time with our wrinkled faces, we shall rejoice and be glad well knowing that we did all that was within our means to empower our people to exploit many opportunities and realize their fullest potential on the road to economic and social freedom.”



Okere City's First Strategic Goal and Objectives

For the first three years, our overall goal is to create and strengthen a solid partnership with community members of Okere parish by being open, transparent and involving them in the conceptualization, design and implementation of practical solutions to the day-to-day development challenges that they face. All our projects shall seek to enhance the rural population's abilities by promoting knowledge development and vocational skills acquisition, creating access to the existing farm and off-farm economic development opportunities, conservation the natural ecosystems and ensuring and providing quality Medicare to the rural population in Okere.

Our Goal will be hinged on five strategic objectives, namely;

1. Local Economic Development (LED).

- Running rural farm and off-farm enterprise projects to create employment opportunities and business forward and backward linkages.
- Improving access to market information through both digital and physical market information systems. Providing opportunities for market linkages to better buyers of agricultural products.
- Creating platforms for adding value to agricultural products e.g. establishing bulking centers and/or small ware houses, grain silos; setting up processing facilities among others.
- Increasing access to financial services through the formation and ensuring the effective and efficient functionalization of Village Savings and Loans Associations (VSLAs).
- Creating and promoting Smart-tech agricultural opportunities.
- Establishment of social businesses that provide basic products and services to the rural population.



“For the first three years, our overall goal is to create and strengthen a solid partnership with community members of Okere parish.”



2. Capacity Building through Educational and Skills Training.

- Running Functional Adult Literacy (FAL) programmes
- Establishing an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Centre.
- Running vocational programmes in elementary skills training.
- Establishing primary, secondary and tertiary educational programmes.

3. Environmental Management and Protection.

- Promoting afforestation by establishing the Okere Tree Multiplication Centre and supporting the establishment of household woodlots and community forest parklands.
- Carrying out massive sensitization and awareness and engaging in environmental advocacy.

4. Sports and Social Co-Creation.

Sports Development - Establishment of various community sports training grounds for different sporting activities. This will include tennis courts, basketball courts, volleyball courts, football pitch, among others.

- Offering training and coaching lessons to the talented people in such fields.
- Organizing social events and sports tournaments and creative artistic competitions.



5. Public Health Service Delivery

- Promoting better access to various medical facilities and health service.
- Running sensitization campaigns to improve nutrition and better sanitation practices.
- Drilling and servicing community boreholes to provide access to safe and healthy water for drinking and household use.

Message from our Co-Founder

Greetings from Okere City!

The year 2019 was a phenomenal one for Okere City as an ambitious community development project. I am pleased to share on behalf of the people of Okere and the community members who run this bold dream called Okere City our progress and vision thus far. Okere City's core objective in its foundational stage is to establish relationships, identify opportunities and closely work with the community to harness such opportunities. We are strongly convicted that this can be sustainably done by deploying creative thinking and bold innovative approaches at every step. In fact, our firm belief and conviction in this objective has enabled us to register key milestones.

During the reporting period, Okere City started an early childhood development center that welcomed 40 children (aged 3-6years) as the inaugural batch of learners. The children were able to finish the curriculum of the first level (baby class) and they will now start the second and third level respectively in February 2020.

We also had a courtesy visitation from Hon. Sylvia Akello, the Otuke District Woman Member of Parliament who was instrumental in the formation of Okere Investment Club. The investment club attracted 60 community members who meet every week on Friday to save and borrow through village savings and loan association (VSLA) activities.

We also planted 10,000 eucalyptus trees as an environmental protection drive to promote a greener Okere village. This is in light of the fact that deforestation has taken a serious negative toll on the environment as many people cut trees to make charcoal as a source of income.

To provide basic services and consumable products to the community, we started a grocery store, drug shop and village pub. These facilities have greatly improved access to fundamental products that are required to improve the day to day living in the village.

Overall, in 2019 we interacted, cheered up, learned and created authentic relationships in addition to implementing tangible and impactful community development projects. While meeting community members and visiting their households, I was inspired by the stories of hope, resilience and determination for a better life imbued in the spirits of Okere village. It is such stories and experience that keep me awake to continue working to make this crazy project idea continue making lasting impact in the lives of rural people.



None of our initiatives would be possible without the support of the Otuke District Local Government, especially the Community Development Office who gave us an official operational status. The Local Council 1, II and III in Okere parish also recommended us and continue to provide the requisite advisory services that give a lot of meaning to our work. More so, the community members welcomed and embraced us with open arms. Without their moral, spiritual and physical support, our work would have gone to waste.

As I conclude, let me take this opportunity to share some insights on why I am personally interested and invested in this project. Matter-of-factly, I am investing my time, money and every effort in the Okere City idea for a 'selfish reason'. I call it a 'selfish reason' because Okere is my village and I truly want to create authentic opportunities for my brothers, sisters, cousins, nieces, nephews, aunts and uncles – in short my clan and kin. Somehow, if I do not use my knowledge, skills and other material and/or financial resources I have been blessed with, I would be postponing dependency burden and other associated challenges of absolute poverty to the future and to the next generation. If I could do something to create a better future for my relatives and rural associates, it would be through Okere City. But also, I am blessed to get the best education in development studies both from Makerere University and the London School of Economics and Political Science. If I cannot use by knowledge and skills to better the livelihoods of the people in the village, how would I get the moral and technical authority to influence development work anywhere else? This questions gets me to work every day while emboldening my vision to bear the idea and make it work whether by hook and crook.

My excitement that the Okere City idea has seen light and come to life in 2019 cannot be measured and I look forward to supporting it in any way to make it be a living proof of concept that works and can be replicated everywhere across the world. I hope you do support it too.

Ojok Okello



Messages from Okere City Community Management Committee

“Being entrusted by the community to be the Chairperson of the management committee is a big honour which I am already reciprocating by working hard and making sure that the committee members continue being a bridge between the community and Okere City project. I am personally committed to make sure the rich ideas behind this project are implemented to create the kind of impact that such ideas envision”



Milton Ochen



Ogwal Austino

“Okere City project has given me the opportunity to serve my community which I diligently do in my capacity as the communications and mobilisation secretary. I am so proud of what we have been able to achieve in a very short period of time. This is a sign of better things that are yet to come because of the project”



Tonny Obong

“The commitment shown by the members of Okere village to make sure that the projects we have started implementing, such as, the nursery school is testament that they we have started a journey to something big and that our work will bear ripe fruits in future”



Lucy Arach

“I have seen first-hand the progress that can be made when we work together as a community who are interested to be champions of addressing the problems they face. We have achieved a lot and yet we have just scratched the surface. We should do more and continue centering our work on addressing the real and actual problems that people in Okere village face”

“Education is the most powerful tool that can be used to make the world a better place.”

Nelson Mandela



Highlights from our Projects in 2019

1. Okere Community School

“We are starting this community school from kindergarten because laying a firm foundation is a key pre-requisite for a solid education background” Ojok Okello noted during the first community meeting attended by 25 parents. During the community meeting, parents expressed enthusiasm and the zeal to do their best to make sure that their children get an opportunity to learn. Lillian Otim, who has enrolled two of her children at the school re-echoed her commitment to support the school in the best way possible. “This is a unique opportunity for my children to get the education I never got” she said. make sure the rich ideas behind this project are implemented to create the kind of impact that such ideas envision”

As part of the community ownership of the school, parents contribute in-kind support such as provide any manual labor force that is required to do any project in the school. For instance, they formed a school construction committee to mobilize labor to facilitate construction projects at the school and provide locally available materials such as spear grass for thatching the classroom, laying bricks to build class rooms and office spaces among others. Parents also buy scholarship materials for their children and each parent contributes 1USD every month to pay for wages for the school cook.

The motto of Okere Community School Yamo Akwo Koddo means a living wind blows in the local Lango dialect. The motto is inspired by the fact that education is an enabler for prosperity and good living which feels like freshness ushered in by a cool wind/breeze in a hot sunny day, a characteristic climatic condition of Okere village.



Shining a Light on Teacher Florence Achayo



Florence Achayo is a trained early childhood development specialist. She brings over 4 years experience and she has been an instrumental pillar in making sure that the Okere Early Childhood Development Centre which is a flagship project of Okere Community School project comes to life.

As an organization we are extremely proud of teacher Florence and we cannot be more grateful for her invaluable services which continue to strengthen our resolve to be an organization that addresses fundamental learning and educational challenges in Okere village.

We are Grateful to our Children-Sponsors



"I am happy to sponsor Gillian Adongo at Okere Community School because I believe it will give her the opportunity to get the education she deserves"

Juliane Bing

In 2019, we got two generous sponsors to give two children at the school a chance to study through our Sponsor-A-Child initiative. We are grateful to Aislyn Row from Canada whose donation has been matched to give Gillian Adongo, a needy but brilliant child whose grandmother has also been volunteering to cook porridge for children at the school.

Julienne Bing, who is currently pursuing her a Master's Degree programme at Science Po in Paris also offered to pay school fees to one child at the community school. His donation has been matched to sponsor Deborah Amolo. Deborah is very active in class and highly interested in learning. She is five years old. Deborah's father, Mr. Ogwal Austino is the chief community mobiliser of our school. His work is to inform the parents about activities happening in the school and mobilize them to participate in school projects. Besides relentlessly volunteering to make sure that the school functions properly, Austino also tries his best to effectively bring the necessary schools requirements and provide in-kind labour support during the school's construction projects.

What Community Members Say about the Community School



"In just a month, I notice big difference in my granddaughter's comprehension and socializing abilities. The school is a blessing to our village".

Adongo Lilly

"I am calling upon all parents and stakeholders in the school not to give up even when things are tough. If we do so, we shall be letting our children down which is the worst thing a parent can do."



Alum Betty



"This is a unique opportunity for my children to get the best education."

Dillies Apio

"In my wildest imagination, I never thought my child would ever get the opportunity to get an education like the children who go to schools in Lira town and Kampala. Okere Community School offers such quality education for my child here in Okere and for that, I will do everything within my power to make sure that the school succeeds as a beacon of hope for all our children in this village and beyond".



Adongo Scovia



2. Re-Afforesting Okere

Okere village faces an existential climate threat posed by an alarming deforestation that has left the village bare and open. Shea trees which have long been a source of natural oils and wind breaks have also been cut down for charcoal production. As such, we have led campaigns against cutting of shea trees and also planted eucalyptus trees as our first environmental management project.

3. Okere Investment Village Saving and Loan Association (VSLA) Club

We started Okere Investment VSLA group in Sept 2019 and three months on Dec 2019, the group had their VSLA activities into an important financial access engine addressing one of the core challenges of rural development in Okere village. Whilst many other VSLAs exist in the village and other neighbouring villages, their small loan portfolios significantly thwart their abilities to give reasonable credit to many members who would like to borrow. This make Okere Investment Club a go-to group because of the slightly bigger lending capital and committed members who regularly attend meeting and save consistently



“Okere Investment VSLA Club has been it easier to borrow reasonable capital to grow my business”.

Ejang Eunice





4. Games and Sports

Apart from setting up a volley court, we also introduced other mind-games like coro, draft, ludo where community members engage in during leisure hours.

5. Okere City Supermarket and Pub

Access to basic grocery products such as salt, soap, sugar among other is a big problem in Okere. Ordinary village residents have to wait for a week to purchase such items on Sunday at Pat Oali market. To bring such products closure to the people, we opened-up Okere City Supermarket.

The supermarket has already started boosting the local economy by providing local markets for certain products made locally within the community.



6. Water, Sanitation and Hygiene - WASH

For decades, one of the direst public health challenge in Okere village was access to safe drinking water. For most households, women and girls had to trek for over 4KM to fetch a jerrycan of water from the nearest borehole.

For many, the easiest option was to resort to water collection from the unprotected open wells. Because of this, outbreaks of waterborne diseases such as typhoid, cholera, dysentery were very rampant In recent years.



“The borehole has significantly made my life easier because I no longer have to walk for miles to fetch water”.

Mary Achai



SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hon. Silvia Akello, Otuke District Woman Member of Parliament

“Okere City Project project is on a journey to create something different. Something of its kind in the entire Northern Uganda”.

Hon. Silvia Akello

We are strongly convicted that political leaders play a key role in community development. That is why we are always keen to host political leaders of different political affiliations to engage with members of Okere Village. This way, we provide a platform for community members to have direct engagement with the political leaders whom they elected to represent them at various levels. By facilitating such dialogues between community members and their leaders, we create an environment for fostering a better understanding and promoting constructive civic engagements.

One of the political leaders in Otuke District is Hon. Akello Silvia who is the area woman Member of Parliament. She had returned during one of our constituency visits when we reached out to her to pay us a courtesy visit which she positively responded to. Although it was a short visit due to a threatening incoming rain, Akello did not only inspire us but she gave us hope. She reminded us that nothing grandeur and impactful was started by a narrow-minded people. “That is why I think this project is on a journey to create something different, something of its kind in the entire Northern Uganda” Akello emphatically reiterated.

Shortly before Akello addressed the audience, she was taken on a tour around our child development center, a community school started to provide better early childhood development opportunities to the children in the village. She also had a look at the Eucalyptus Parkland. Mr. Ojok Okello, the vision bearer of the Okere City Project also shared with her future plans about transforming a remote village in a more thriving ‘city’.

“When Ojok showed me the current projects and shared with me his future development ideas about the Okere City project, I was amazed and thanked God that a young brilliant man is massively investing to make his community more prosperous and better prepared about tackle future challenges” Akello said. “This is what we need to move forward. After all, charity begins from home” she noted.

Although excited, Akello also reminded the community members that nothing would move forward without their support and unimpeded commitment. She said that by virtue of the ambitious project being implemented in the village, it means that the villagers have to work thrice as hard to make sure the bold mission of the is achieved. “If you don’t commit, support and be a part of this, it’s destined to go no further” Akello warned.



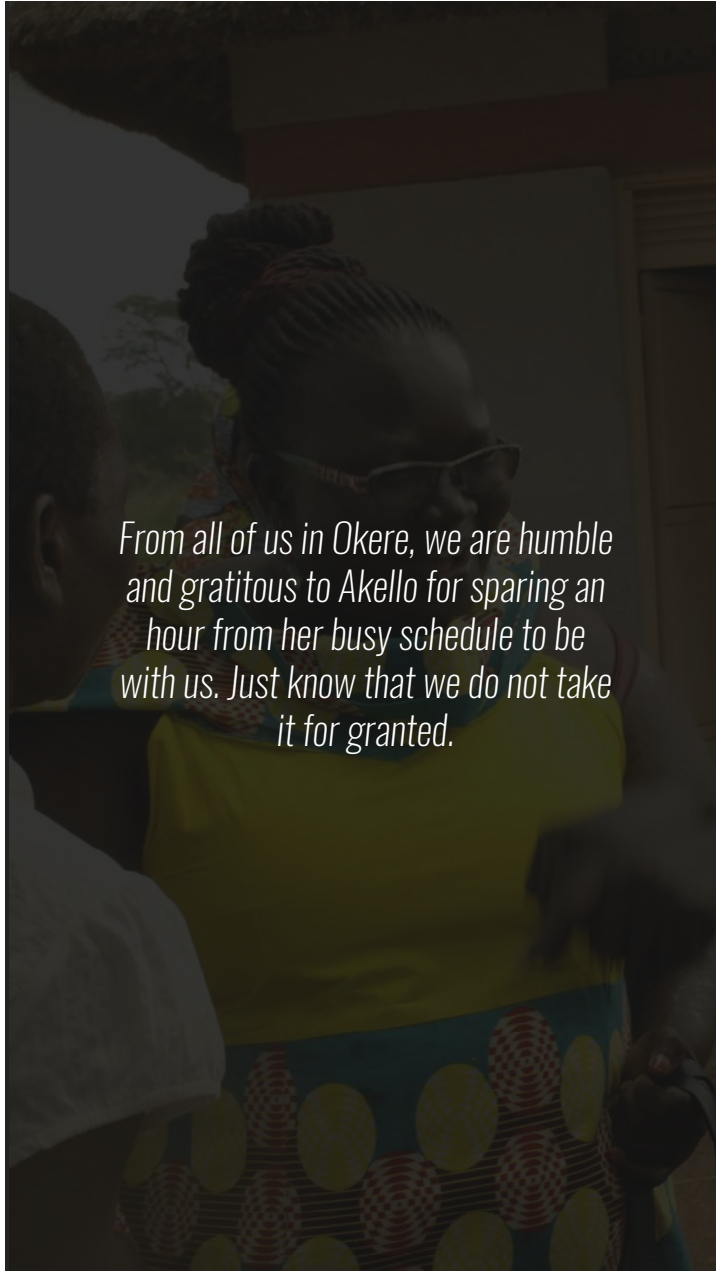
Tonny Obong Okello who is one of the co-founders of the project thanked Akello for her visit to the village and encourage her to be a friend and supporter of Okere City project in any way. “We cannot do this alone” Obong said. “Please be our voice and champion” he further requested. Milton Ochen, the Chairperson of Okere Community School also gave a more detail update about the school highlighting major milestones and challenges. As a milestone, Ochen said “this school is one of the best things that has ever happened in this village. Our children now have access to the best early childhood development opportunity, moreover for free”. “The parents are also doing their best to make sure that the school functions smoothly by contributing in-kind towards construction projects, providing food items and also making sure that the school cook is paid” he added.

During the meeting, Aker Martin, the Chairperson of Okere Investment Club also gave an update about the club highlighting the progress thus far. “Our club, started just a few weeks ago now has 50 members who are passionate about saving and investing for the future” Aker said. How I wish we could be boosted to raise our investible capital? Aker wondered.

On that note, Hon. Akello made a contribution of 500,000 UGX as loanable capital to the club. “But When I return, I will need a report of what this money has done for the good of this community” Akello remarked as she concluded her courtesy visit.

From all of us in Okere, we are humble and grateful to Akello for sparing an hour from her busy schedule to be with us. Just know that we do not take it for granted.

Wan Apwoyo Hon. Akello.



From all of us in Okere, we are humble and grateful to Akello for sparing an hour from her busy schedule to be with us. Just know that we do not take it for granted.





Key Lessons learned in 2019

a) Understanding community needs and aspirations is key. We succeeded because we listened to the community and invested in projects that matter most to them!

b) Investing in healthy relationships is the springboard for success. We took time to know more about our community members!

c) Regular meetings and reflections help to address problems as they come. Early solutions to emerging problems defined our successes in 2019.

d) Nothing beats involving women more. They understand the context and even work harder. That's why we invested more in projects that bring the greatest rewards to women in 2019.



What we are looking forward to do in 2020!

We shall continue with our 2019 projects, but also start up new ones, namely;

a) We shall start-up an Animal Farm to provide income to contribute towards running our projects.

b) We shall construct two a three-class roomed block to provide learning spaces for our children!

c) We shall start-up Middle and Top Classes for our early childhood development centre.

d) We shall establish a Community Edutainment Centre and start showing films, football matches to generate additional incomes for our project

e) We shall establish a community Health Centre to provide the much needed health services to our community.


f) We shall start-up a tree multiplication centre to raise tree seedlings to distribute to community members.


g) We shall also expand the range of sporting facilities to include a football ground, tennis court, netball pitch.

h) We shall also establish a vocational training institute beginning with a carpentry and joinery training centre.



CONTACT US

 Tel. +256(0) 774 547023,
Mob. +256(0) 759 756018

 Ayiloi 'A' Village, Okere Parish
Adwari Sub-County,
Otuke District

 okerecityproject@gmail.com
info@okerecity.org

Follow us on social media via

   @okerecity



KERE CITY



www.okerecity.org