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Toilets Hold the Key to Enrollment at Embattled Ugandan School



Source of despair: Head teacher Auma Prisca Oyella at the boys' toilets at Ogul School

Auma Prisca Oyella, the head teacher of the Ogul primary school in northern Uganda, surveys her school with alarm. The classrooms lack doors and windows. The water tank is broken. Even the precious bore hole - the source of all water to the school - requires a mighty effort before water can be drawn.

Toilets are the worst. Three latrines for girls, installed in 2009, are crumbling and almost full. They pose such a risk, said Ms Oyella, that "students are afraid they will collapse."

The boys' toilets are in even worse shape. Two years ago, in desperation, Ms Oyella went with a group of school parents to nearby Gulu town and came away with three abandoned portable toilets from an old IDP camp. The mobilettes now serve Ogul school, but they inspire dread among older boys. "The plastic floors move and boys are afraid they will fall in," said Ms Oyella. "They also dislike going to the toilet without doors."

The toilets are also infested with worms, which is particularly unpleasant for students like Andrew, 8, who comes from a poor family and does not own sandals. Andrew also has a minor disability in his knees, which makes it hard for him to squat.



Andrew, 8, does not own sandals and hates the worms in the Ogul toilets

Ms Oyella blames the school's lack of toilets for a disastrous fall in enrollment, from 560 students in 2016 to 375 this year. Charles Nyeko, head of the parents' association and father of four children at Ogul school, agrees. He estimates that over 120 children in the village are staying home even though Ugandan law requires them to attend.

Many parents have given up on the government. Even though primary education is supposed to be free, Mr Nyeko spends up to 250,000 shillings (\$68) each term on uniforms, exams, lunch and fees. The district nurse has only visited once in 6 months and the government has failed to live up to promises. "I have begged them

and they did nothing" said Ms Oyella. The burden of improving services falls on parents, who have nothing more to give.

Surrounded by crisis, Ms Oyella responded with enthusiasm when the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU), a leading advocate for disability rights, offered to install four new latrines this summer. Funding has been provided by The Advocacy Project (AP) and the online giving marketplace [Givology](#). AP has sent [Peace Fellow Lauren Halloran](#) to help.



Willing hands: Parents from Ogul School show their commitment by digging the new latrines

Ms Oyella watched with satisfaction recently as scores of parents, led by Mr Nyeko, dug a deep pit for the new latrines (photo). Jimmy Odera, a local contractor, then came in with his team and began work on the construction. GDPU hopes to hand the toilets over to the school at a public ceremony by the end of July.

The Ogul accessible toilet will be the second installed by GDPU and AP in the area. The first was built at Tochi school in 2015 with funds raised by [Peace Fellow Josh Levy](#), after persistent reports that students with disability were dropping out because of bad sanitation and bullying.

A recent mission by GDPU and AP found that a culture of cooperation and hygiene has prevailed at Tochi since the new toilet was installed. Enrollment has grown. Bullying has stopped as a result of GDPU's inclusivity training and decisive action by school management. Two special needs teachers cater to disability. Students clean out the new toilet after it is used by students who cannot carry water themselves.

Tochi has also produced some rousing success stories. Ivan Olanya, a student with polio whose [plight stirred AP's interest in Tochi](#), recently graduated with good grades to a secondary school.



GDPU's team at Ogul: Jimmy Odera, contractor; Lauren Halloran, Peace Fellow; Patrick Ojok, team leader.

The bad news is that the Tochi parents remain disengaged. Locals have vandalized the gutter which provides rainwater to the new toilet, leading Patrick Ojok from GDPU to suggest that the toilet should be converted to a dry latrine and supplied with a portable seat.

One key difference between the two schools is that all students at Ogul are at risk from the sanitation crisis, not just those with disability. But Ogul parents are fiercely committed - and convinced that students will return if new toilets are built.

"Knowing that others are investing in their school will raise morale and also improve hygiene," said Mr Nyeko. "Parents will respond."

* Peace Fellow [Lauren Halloran](#) will launch an online appeal for the Ogul toilet on Global Giving on July 12. All donations will be matched 50%. Look for details on our website!

* Follow the construction of the Ogul toilet through [Lauren's blogs](#).

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