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Enrollment Soars at Ugandan Schools After Accessible Toilets Are Installed



Thirteen new toilets were installed at the Awach School in Gulu District, Uganda, this summer. Monitoring suggests that morale and hygiene have already improved.

Two remote primary schools in northern Uganda have reported a sharp increase in enrollment, following the installation of accessible toilets last year by the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU), a leading advocate for disability rights, and The Advocacy Project (AP).

Christine Okot, the head teacher at the Ogul School in Gulu District, told a recent mission from GDPU and AP that enrollment at her school had jumped from 375 students in 2017 to 464 this year, following the installation of the new toilets.

"Enrollment changed after putting in the toilets," said Ms Okot. "The whole community appreciates it and children like the place. It is also their responsibility to keep the toilets clean." Ms Okot said that there had been no cases of diarrhea - a sign of good hygiene.



Christine Okot, Principal at the Ogul School, with her new toilets and hand-washing station.

Another school to receive a new toilet under GDPU's program, at Tochi, has also reported increased enrollment from 418 in 2016 to 466 in 2018.

GDPU and AP began to install accessible toilets in Gulu schools after surveys found that the lack of proper WASH facilities was having a disastrous effect on enrollment. Conditions at Ogul were so bad that the

school was using long-abandoned toilets from a former refugee camp. Many students were afraid the floors would collapse and chose to return home to relieve themselves.

All that has now changed. One reason is that parents dug the new latrine pit at Ogul, which gave them a sense of ownership and an incentive to enroll their children. Parents also turned out in large numbers this past summer to dig the latrine pit at the Awach School, as described in [these blogs by Peace Fellow Chris Markomanolakis](#).



Parents came out to dig the Awach latrine this summer.

In spite of the encouraging news from Ogul and Tochi, it will take more than toilets to improve the quality of education, which is GDPU's ultimate goal. Attendance at schools falls off sharply during the harvest. Classrooms are in disrepair. Few schools have a special needs teacher for students with disability.

Most serious, overworked parents have to cover most of the school costs. This year, the district government only contributed 3.5 million shillings (\$937) to Ogul's 2018 budget (\$3,750).

As a result, GDPU views toilets as the first step in a larger package of support for schools that would promote the inclusivity of students with special needs, improve health and hygiene, motivate teachers, teach life skills and even offer sports and school lunches.

The biggest threat to this vision comes from a shortage of government investment. Akena Cesar, the District Education Officer for Gulu, estimated that only 10 of the district's 55 primary schools meet the government standard (one toilet to 40 students). But, he said, his office rarely has enough funds for more than two projects a year.

On a more optimistic note, Mr Cesar praised GDPU's WASH model and asked for GDPU's help in upgrading facilities at the Abaka School, which has just two toilets for 405 students. Each partner will build 4 stalls at the Abaka school next year. AP and GDPU are seeking funds to cover their share of the costs.



GDPU hopes that accessible toilets will improve health and teach life skills.

* Read the blogs of Fellows who have worked on GDPU's WASH campaign: [Rebecca](#) (2011); [Dane](#) (2012); [John](#) (2013); [Katy](#) (2014); [Josh](#) (2015); [Amy](#) (2016); [Lauren](#) (2017); and [Chris](#) (2018).

* View 2018 [photos of the Awach project](#).

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