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### **New Toilets Save Ugandan Primary School from Closure**



**Big dig: Parents at work on the Abaka School latrine**

The Gulu district government in northern Uganda has decided to keep a primary school open after the installation of five new and accessible toilets by an advocacy group for persons with disability.

The toilets were built at the Abaka School by the Gulu Disabled Persons Union (GDPU), an AP partner, between June and August and formally handed over the school authorities on August 12. [GDPU has uploaded photos of the handover.](#)

According to Patrick Ojok, the GDPU project leader, the Gulu district education office had decided to close the Abaka School because none of the school toilets were usable. As a

result, enrollment at Abaka has fallen from 405 last year to 286. The government requires a ratio of 40 students to each toilet.

"This project has certainly saved Abaka School from closing," said Mr Ojok.

Abaka is the fourth school to benefit from GDPU's WASH program, which installs accessible toilets and hand-washing stations and backs this up with training for staff and pupils.



**The new Abaka toilets are opened at a ceremony**

was provided by parishioners at the [Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in Dublin, Ohio](#).

AP and GDPU visited the Abaka School last November and found the teachers listless and demoralized. Some parents were so disinterested in the hygiene of their children that they had stolen gutters which collected rainwater for hand-washing.

The turnaround this summer has been dramatic. According to Mr Ojok, 126 parents helped to dig the latrine pit for the new toilets. He described this as a "historic event for the entire Abaka community."

Under an agreement between GDPU and the District Education Officer, the district was supposed to install four new toilets at Abaka for use by boys, while GDPU would build the girls' toilets. But the government structure collapsed within weeks.

The original goal in 2015 was to provide for students with a disability, but it has since become clear that new toilets raise morale and improve hygiene for the entire school. [Learn more about the WASH crisis in Ugandan schools and GDPU's response.](#)

Over 2,500 students are now benefiting from the GDPU program, which has cost around \$28,000 over the four years. Most of the money has been raised by Peace Fellows and come from individual donors. Funding for the Abaka project



**Job well done: Patrick Ojok from the GDPU at the opening ceremony**

toilets will not be known until next February, when the next school year begins. But based on his monitoring of the three other schools where GDPU has worked, Mr Ojok is sure that enrollment will increase.

"I am confident the kids will return," he said.

\* [Donate to GDPU's program.](#)

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As a result, the five toilets installed by GDPU will serve the entire school until the government toilets can be rebuilt. Mr Ojok said that the parents have insisted on being involved, as they were with the GDPU project.

GDPU hopes that the success at Abaka can encourage the government to use the GDPU model in future school WASH projects. GDPU toilets cost around half the price of government toilets and the engagement of parents makes it more likely that they will be maintained.

The impact of the new Abaka